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The French Communist Party and French Cinema
1944-1999

by

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A thesis submitted in fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of
Doctor of Philosophy in Film and Television Studies

University of Warwick, Department of Film and Television Studies

January 2000

to Alfred, Jean-Claude and Andrée Marie

and

Quentin, Ghirma, Lou and Mathieu

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Acknowledgements

This work would not have moved from the realm of fantasy to the bookshelves of reality without the precious help and support of many people. First I would like to thank my supervisor, Professor Ginette Vincendeau, for her extremely useful and enlightening supervision but also for her trust and patience when chapter delivery was somewhat delayed. Colleagues in the Department of French of University College Dublin will also be relieved to see this work completed. I wish to express my deepest gratitude to my colleague Douglas Smith for his continuous support and invaluable advice. Thanks also to Emer O'Beirne, Stephen Schwartz, Agnès Maillot; special thanks should go to Mairéad Hanrahan.

I would also like to thank Claude Michel and René Vautier for their time and courtesy. The staff of the following institutions should also be acknowledged for their invaluable help and impressive serenity: the Archives départementales de la Seine-Saint-Denis (Françoise Wurtz), the Centre National de la Cinématographie (Estelle Baïche), the Forum des Images (Muriel Carpentier), The États Généraux de la Culture (Lili Pires) and everyone in the Bibliothèque du Film (BIFI), the Bibliothèque Nationale de France and the Bibliothèque de l'Arsenal. Chantal Barry cannot be thanked, and comforted, enough for having put me up and put up with me throughout most of my research periods in Paris. How I can still claim to be a friend of hers remains a mystery to me. Finally one of the most rewarding aspects of this project is the friendship of Luce Vigo and Émile Breton, whose kindness is matched only by their generosity.

Abstract

This dissertation examines the relationship between the French Communist Party (PCF) and French cinema between 1944 and 1999. The approach adopted is an historical and political one, exploring the context behind the changing relations between the Party and the film industry. Both institutions have played a crucial part in the weaving of the political and cultural fabric of the country throughout the period. For both the PCF and French cinema, the Liberation marked a new beginning and a new relationship with the French state. Looking closely at the French Communist outlets over four key periods — the Liberation and the Cold War, the New Republic, May '68, and the 1990s —, the evolution of the positions of the PCF regarding both film as an industry and film as an art-form is examined with particular emphasis on the links and the differences between the film policy advocated by the PCF and its critical discourse on French cinema. Since 1944 the PCF has kept a close watch on France's film industry, participating, from the Blum-Byrne agreements to the demonstrations against the MAI, in every battle for its defence. The unique blend of State involvement in film matters and professional resilience in the face of foreign competition which defines French cinema today owes much to this Communist involvement. Yet in spite of this continuous support the PCF has not left a strong mark on French cinema either in aesthetic or ideological terms, and the silver screen has hardly ever broadcast the PCF viewpoint. The reluctance shown by some in the Party to acknowledge the concept of auteur as well as the Party's own history serve to explain this absence. Until the 1980s, the PCF's discourse was dominated by the defence of France's national culture, although some Communist critics and auteurs disputed this vision tainted with economism. It was only in the 1990s that the PCF's position on French cinema really changed. Independent auteurs are now fully supported by the Party and are viewed as guarantors of the welfare of the film industry as a whole. This realignment can be explained by the fact that both the PCF and the independent film sector now find themselves involved in a shared struggle against economic globalisation and American cultural, economic and political hegemony.

Conventions

In order to avoid repetitions, both Party with upper case P and the acronym PCF will be used to denote the French Communist Party. Similarly, the *Fédération du Spectacle* CGT will simply be referred to as *Fédération du Spectacle*. When referring to matters relating to the film industry and the film trade, the adjective ‘corporatist’ will sometimes be used, bearing in mind that it must be understood as referring to the film trade workforce.

Given the large number of quotations and references taken from the Communist press, it has not been possible to identify every corresponding page number. For the earlier periods examined, damaged or imperfect microfilms are often the cause of this absence. For the Nineties, data originating from the Internet was also collected without any visible reference to the original newspaper’s page number. Should readers want to find the original text, it should prove relatively easy to find any given page by simply using the date of publication.

All quotations from French texts have been translated. Titles of articles have nevertheless been left in the source language so as to facilitate readers who wish to research the original material. In view of the fact that not all French films have translated English titles and in order to keep a certain homogeneity, these have also been left in French.

List of Abbreviations

ACE: Alliance Cinématographique Européenne
 ACID: Agence du Cinéma Indépendant pour sa Diffusion
 AFCAE: Agence Française des Cinémas d’Art et Essai
 AMI: Accord Multilatéral sur l’Investissement = MAI: Multilateral Agreement on Investments
 ARP: Association des Réalisateurs-Producteurs
 ASSEDIC: Association pour l’Emploi dans l’Industrie et le Commerce
 ATTAC: Action pour une Taxe sur les Transactions Financières pour l’Aide aux Citoyens
 BLIC: Bureau de Liaison des Industries du Cinéma
 BLOC: Bureau de Liaison des Organisations du Cinéma
 BSAC: British Screen Advisory Council
 CCAS: Caisse Centrale des Activités Sociales
 CDCF: Comité de Défense du Cinéma Français
 CES: Confédération Européenne des Syndicats = ETCU: European Trade Union Confederation
 CFDT: Centrale Confédérale des Travailleurs

CFTC: Confédération Française des Travailleurs Chrétiens
 CGCF: Coopérative Générale du Cinéma Français
 CGT: Confédération Générale du Travail = CGT(K): CGT (Kominform)
 CGT-FO: Confédération Générale du Travail-Force Ouvrière
 CLCF: Comité de Libération du Cinéma Français
 CNC: Centre National de la Cinématographie
 CNE: Comité National des Écrivains
 CNPT: Chasse Pêche Nature et Tradition
 CNR: Conseil National de la Résistance
 CNRS: Centre National de la Recherche Scientifique
 COIC: Comité d'Organisation de l'Industrie Cinématographique
 COMAC: Commission d'Action Militaire du Conseil National de la Résistance
 CPL: Comité de Libération Parisien
 CSA: Conseil Supérieur de l'Audiovisuel
 CUAA: Committee of Un-American Activities
 DL: Démocratie Libérale
 EDC: European Defence Community
 EDF-GDF: Électricité de France-Gaz de France
 EGC: États Généraux du Cinéma Français (EGC)
 EGCu: États Généraux de la Culture
 ENPC: École Nationale de Photographie et de Cinématographie
 FEMIS: Fondation Européenne des Métiers de l'Image et du Son
 FFI-PF: Forces Françaises de l'Intérieur—Partisans de France
 FGDS: Fédération de la Gauche Démocratique et Socialiste
 FN: Front National
 FO: Force Ouvrière
 GATT: General Agreements on Trade and Tariff
 IDHEC: Institut des Hautes Etudes Cinématographiques
 LCR: Ligue Communiste Révolutionnaire
 LO: Lutte Ouvrière
 MDC: Mouvement des Citoyens
 MEDEF: Mouvement des Entrepreneurs et Dirigeants d'Entreprise Français
 MEP: Member of the European Parliament
 MN: Mouvement National
 MPPDA: Motion Picture Producers and Distributors of America
 MRG: Mouvement des Radicaux de Gauche
 MRP: Mouvement du Rassemblement Populaire
 NAFTA: North American Free Trade Agreement
 OECD: Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development
 ORTF: Office de la Radio-Télévision française
 PAF: Paysage Audiovisuel Français
 PCF: Parti Communiste Français
 PET: Partenariat Économique Transatlantique = NTM: New Transatlantic Market
 PROCIREP: Société des Producteurs de Cinéma et de Télévision
 PS: Parti Socialiste
 RPR: Rassemblement pour la République
 SACD: Société des Auteurs-Compositeurs Dramatiques
 SFAI: Syndicat Français des Artistes-Interprètes
 SFIO: Section Française de l'Internationale Ouvrière
 SOGEC: Société de Gestion et d'Exploitation de Cinéma
 SRF: Société des Réalisateurs de Films
 TPS: Télévision par Satellite
 UDF: Union de la Démocratie Française
 UGC: Union Générale Cinématographique
 UNEDIC: Union Nationale pour l'Emploi dans l'Industrie et le Commerce
 UNEF: Union Nationale des Étudiants de France
 UPF: Union des Producteurs Français
 WFTU: World Federation of Trade Union
 WTO: World Trade Organisation

Introduction

In October 1999, the Franco-German TV channel *Arte* broadcast a series of four programmes entitled *The Faith of the Century*, which recounted the history of Communism in the modern world. The entirety of the archive material used in the series was made up of film, mostly documentaries but including some footage from fiction films as well. This choice of selecting only filmic testimonies illustrated the parallel between the development of the Communist ideology and system and the development of the filmic medium in the last hundred years: if Communism was the faith of the twentieth century, cinema was the century's art-form.

This dissertation examines the relationship between the French Communist Party (PCF) and French cinema between 1944 and 1999. The approach adopted is an historical and political one, exploring the context behind the changing relations between the Party and the film industry. In the wake of the Russian revolution, Communism was regarded as the only response to Capitalism and Imperialism not only in Europe but also in America, Africa or Asia. In the aftermath of the First World War, Communism was seen as a liberating force for the oppressed and the masses who had been the war's first casualties. At the same time, it became apparent that cinema, as an entertainment medium, had the potential of attracting the greatest numbers. This characteristic was recognised both by film industrialists in Hollywood and the Bolshevik leaders: the former saw the cinema's capacity to draw huge commercial profit from the film market (already illustrated in France before the First World War by thriving film companies Pathé and Gaumont); the latter, notably Lenin, understood the ideological power of the medium and developed its propagandistic dimension.¹ Early in the century, film became an instrument thanks to which the two antagonistic systems could further their interests. Hollywood studios advertised the American way of life around the world, a role which was recognised by the Washington administration; the Bolsheviks first used films to promote their revolution within the confines of the territories of the Russian empire and later used films as a means to project an idyllic representation of Communism, totally at odds with the reality of the situation. Within twenty-five years of its emergence as a mass entertainment and years before André Malraux's simple formulation — 'besides, cinema is also an industry' —,

¹ See Laurent Creton, *Cinéma et marché* (Paris: Armand Colin, 1997).

cinema was clearly acknowledged as both a powerful marketable industry capable of drawing huge profits and an art-form capable of producing an equally powerful ideological effect on its spectators.

As cinema, industrial Capitalism and Communism were developing at the turn of the last century, the modern concept of nation was also being defined around the same time. The connection between the crystallisation of modern states and the emergence of film has recently been analysed by French film historian and critic Jean-Michel Frodon in *La Projection nationale*.² According to Frodon cinema may be regarded as a means to anchor and project one's conception of the nation. Frodon defines the common features of both phenomena by emphasising how cinema and nation are both the outcome of imaginary representations as well as tangible established systems. According to him one can speak of cinema or nation when both have reached a lasting level of consistency: ideological and territorial consistency for the nation; aesthetic, economic and social consistency for film. As they needed to represent themselves to themselves as well as to the rest of the world, modern nations naturally turned to cinema and its power as a mass entertainment, their respective authorities acknowledging 'the strategic dimension of cinema'.³ For instance, the fact that Hitler's Germany and Mussolini's Italy acknowledged the importance of film as vehicles for their nationalistic discourses may be regarded as confirmation of the phenomenon already seen in the American and Russian use of cinema.

In France too the terms nation, Capitalism and Communism became intertwined very early on. Going back a quarter of a century before the creation of the French Communist Party in Tours in 1920, the link between cinema and the French workers' movement was illustrated in France as early as 1895. The coincidence between the birth of film as an entertainment industry, with customers paying for their seats to watch a film on a large screen, and the foundation of the main French trade union, the *Confédération Générale du Travail* (CGT), is emblematic of the joint development of cinema and the workers' movement. Indeed the conflation between film as art-form and film as industry was contained in *La Sortie des usines Lumière*, the very first film Louis and Auguste

² Jean-Michel Frodon, *La Projection nationale* (Paris: Éditions Odile Jacob, 1998).

³ Frodon, p. 28.

Lumière shot outside their factory: more than for any other art-form, cinema raises the issue of the relationship between the end-product — i.e. the film — and the complex multi-layered process which made this film possible. When considering cinema, industrial, financial and commercial factors have to be taken into account along with aesthetic and thematic considerations. This is what Robert C. Allen and Douglas Gomery have underlined in identifying the different approaches according to which film history may be examined: aesthetic, technological, economic and social film histories.⁴

Context

The object of this research is to look at the relationship between two French institutions — the French Communist Party and French cinema — from the end of the Second World War to the dawn of the new millennium. My decision to study this relationship during this period comes from the respective historical importance of both institutions following the Liberation of France from Nazi occupation. The French Communist Party (PCF) and French cinema have played a crucial part in the weaving of the political and cultural fabric of the country throughout the last fifty five years.

From the Congress of the *Section Française de l'Internationale Ouvrière* at Tours in December 1920 which marked the foundation of the Communist Party when the majority of delegates decided to join the Third International, to the presence of Communist ministers in Jospin's left-wing government of the late 1990s, the PCF has marked the political life of France. As a party based on, and promoting, the principles of Marxist-Leninism, it could be seen as 'an outpost of a Communist world revolutionary movement'.⁵ However, the PCF from the beginning came to play a major role in the national politics of France. Between the mid-thirties and the collapse of Communism in Eastern Europe (1989-91), the PCF balanced its allegiance to international Communism under the leadership of Moscow with its pursuit of its own national agenda, illustrated by the fact that it has occupied ministerial positions in French governments on three

⁴ Robert C. Allen and Douglas Gomery, *Film History, Theory and Practice* (New York: Knopf, 1985).

⁵ David Scott Bell and Byron Criddle, *The French Communist Party in the Fifth Republic* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1994), p. 1.

occasions since the end of the Second World War. The history of the PCF may nevertheless be divided into two periods. The first stretches from its foundation to the Nazi-Soviet non-aggression pact in 1939, followed by the Party's dissolution in 1940. The second period, which may be considered as a 'second coming', started with the PCF's involvement in the Resistance movement and continues today. Moreover, it is the recognition of the PCF's vital role in the Resistance which led to its prominent position at the Liberation and endowed the Party with a true national dimension, highlighted by its first ever participation in a French government. Indeed the PCF's participation in the Resistance as well as in the governments of the Republic legitimised its status as a national political force and as a 'party of government', more than its support for the government of the Popular Front had done in 1936.

For its part, from the first films of the Lumière brothers, in economic and industrial terms French cinema held and continues to hold a privileged position which allows it to be the foremost European producer at the turn of a new millennium. This position is the result of a unique blend of state involvement in film matters and professional resilience in the face of foreign competition.

While French cinema did not come to a standstill during the Occupation, the demise of the collaborationist Vichy regime and the Liberation of France led to a halt in film production and a reorganisation of the industry. It is only after the war that the French film community became truly organised at an institutional and national level, although a succession of initiatives had paved the way for this change in the previous twenty years, albeit rather unsuccessfully.⁶

Echoing the simultaneous development of Capitalism, Communism and film, the French Communist Party has certainly been, of all the French political parties, the most outspoken in matters relating to French cinema and the French film industry. Again the fact that this study begins at the Liberation does not mean that the relationship between the PCF and French cinema did not exist before World War 2. On the contrary, as the majority of historians' accounts of the interwar period show, the PCF was very much a

⁶ See Pierre Billard, *L'Âge classique du cinéma français* (Paris: Flammarion, 1995), pp. 177-195.

presence in French cinema during its first twenty years of existence.⁷ In the 1920s and early 1930s, numerous film practitioners were attracted to the Russian Revolution and its French representative, the PCF. While the artists' support originated from the avant-garde's sympathy for the PCF, the propagandistic use which the PCF made of cinema echoed earlier and contemporary Russian examples. While Jean Renoir's *La Vie est à nous*, the PCF's most famous propaganda film, comes from the interwar period, the PCF did not yet consider the film industry as a priority on its political agenda. Thus when Billard recounts the professional debates about the industry of the 1930s, he only mentions the positions of the film sections of *Confédération Générale du Travail* (CGT), which in 1937 would be brought together in the *Fédération du spectacle* CGT.⁸ The PCF became more directly involved in the affairs of French cinema during the clandestine years of Occupation and Resistance, when French film, like every aspect of French society, was questioned and debated with a view to France's eventual liberation. As a result, the PCF enjoyed a high degree of popularity in the film industry in the post-war period. This popularity coupled with the presence of renowned film personalities in the ranks of the PCF, such as world-famous film historian Georges Sadoul, meant that the Liberation was a sort of golden age for the PCF with regard to its relation to French cinema. For both the PCF and French cinema, the Liberation marked therefore a new beginning and a new relationship with the French nation which explains my decision to analyse the relationship between the PCF and French cinema from this period to the present.

While the number of books devoted to French cinema bears testimony to both its importance and its influence within France and beyond, the significance of the PCF has also been acknowledged in an impressive number of publications dealing with the PCF's eventful history, ideas and people. The relationship between the PCF and intellectual movements in France, a country in which intellectuals have made a considerable contribution to society, has been an ongoing subject of attention. While Michael Kelly has

⁷ In addition to Billard, see also Jean-Pierre Jeancolas, *Quinze Ans d'années trente* (Paris: Stock, 1985); Ginette Vincendeau and Keith Reader, eds, *La Vie est à nous* (London: British Film Institute, 1986); Colin Crisp, *The Classic French Cinema 1930-1960* (Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 1993); and Dudley Andrew, *Mists of Regret, Culture and Sensibility in Classic French Film* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1995).

⁸ Billard, pp. 188-190.

charted the evolution of Marxist thought in France from its beginning through most of the twentieth century, Keith Reader has examined the role and place of French Communists within France's intellectual sphere and intellectual production during and since the May '68 events.⁹ These studies provide invaluable information on both Communist intellectuals' positions and other intellectual movements' views on the Party. It is not surprising that film does not figure prominently in these books as their remit is the domain of history of ideas and political philosophy. In contrast, the very small place allocated to film in the studies of the PCF's intellectuals and the PCF and French intellectuals by Jeanine Verdès-Leroux, David Caute and Sudhir Hazareesingh, which cover the period examined in this thesis, is more surprising.¹⁰ The small number of references to film in these books would lead one to the conclusion that cinema was not a priority item on the PCF's agenda. This point of view is nevertheless contradicted by a number of film studies publications centering on distinctive periods or sectors of French cinema. Thus both Patricia Hubert-Lacombe's *Le Cinéma français et la Guerre froide 1946-1956* and Sylvia Harvey's *May '68 and Film Culture* insist on the PCF's pivotal role in the specific historical moments they have examined.¹¹ Thematic approaches such as Jean Pivasset's *Essai sur la signification politique du cinéma* and Sylvie Lindeperg's *Les Écrans de l'ombre* contain vital analyses of the French Communist stance on their respective subjects.¹² By focussing on a specific theme or a specific period, they are unable to take into account the evolution which the French Communist Party experienced over a period of fifty years. For instance the Communist positions on French cinema in and around May '68 can be better defined and understood by looking at

⁹ See Michael Kelly, *Modern French Marxism* (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1982), Keith Reader, *Intellectuals and the Left in France since 1968* (Basingstoke: Macmillan, 1987) and *The May 1968 Events in France* (New York, St Martin Press, 1993) and Tony Judt, *Past Imperfect, French Intellectuals 1944-1956* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1992).

¹⁰ Jeanine Verdès-Leroux, *Au service du Parti : Le PC, les intellectuels et la culture 1944-1956* (Paris: Fayard, 1983) and *Le Réveil des somnambules : Le PC, les intellectuels et la culture 1956-1985* (Paris: Fayard, 1987); David Caute, *Communism and the French Intellectuals* (London: André Deutsch, 1964) and *The Fellow-Travelers 1917-1968*, revised edition (London: Yale, 1988); Sudhir Hazareesingh, *Intellectuals and the French Communist Party* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1991).

¹¹ Patricia Hubert-Lacombe, *Le Cinéma français dans la Guerre froide: 1946-1953* (Paris: L'Harmattan, 1996); Sylvia Harvey, *May '68 and Film Culture* (London: BFI Publishing, 1980). See also Jean-Pierre Bertin-Maghit, *Le Cinéma français sous l'occupation* (Paris: Olivier Orban, 1989).

¹² Jean Pivasset's *Essai sur la signification politique du cinéma; l'exemple français, de la libération aux événements de Mai 1968* (Paris: Cujas, 1971); Sylvie Lindeperg, *Les Écrans de l'ombre* (Paris: Éditions du CNRS, 1997). See also Paul Légise, *Histoire de la politique du cinéma français*, tome II: *Entre deux républiques, 1940-46* (Paris: Filméditations/Pierre Lherminier, 1977).

what these were in the 1950s and early 1960s as well as how they subsequently changed in the 1990s.

I should also mention here histories of French cinema, which all make reference to the PCF, albeit to various extents. Indeed, as far as French politics is concerned, the proportion of references to the PCF as opposed to references to other French political organisations is an unambiguous indication of the special relationship between the PCF and French cinema.¹³ While these histories offer essential information on the PCF's views on French film, they tend at times to simplify the PCF's positions, and consequently to present a simplistic depiction of the Party's stance. Thus the PCF's film policy or critical approach are often described as if they were unproblematic. This dissertation aims to portray the distinct relationship between the PCF and French cinema from an historical angle which takes into account not only the changes experienced by both the PCF and French cinema across the duration of the years spanning the end of the war and the late 1990s, but also the debates which took place within the PCF regarding French cinema as well as those within French cinema regarding the PCF.

Structure of the thesis

The PCF's film policy from the Liberation to the last decade of the twentieth century constitutes the first of the two strands of this dissertation. The organisation of the film industry advocated by the PCF will be analysed in relation to its overall policy. Film professionals' perception of the PCF's views on the film sector will also be investigated. Did the PCF denounce the capitalist character of the film trade and advocate new industrial and economic structures in accordance with its Marxist-Leninist principles, or did it make the best of the existing framework and concentrate on the defence of one of the national industries of France? Issues of national industrial organisation, international competition and European construction will be central to the discussion.

¹³ In addition to Billard and Crisp see also Jean-Michel Frodon, *L'Âge moderne du cinéma français* (Paris: Flammarion, 1995); Alan Williams, *Republic of Images* (Cambridge, Mass. and London: Harvard University Press, 1994 (1992)); Jill Forbes, *French Cinema since the New Wave* (London: BFI/Macmillan, 1992); Susan Hayward, *French National Cinema* (London: Routledge, 1993).

While such an analysis gives a clear indication of the PCF's policy on film as an industry, it is not sufficient to give us a full picture of the relationship between the two institutions. Film is also an art-form, endowed with cultural, aesthetic and ideological properties. In addition, the fact that the concept of auteurism was formulated with particular vigour in the early years of the period covered, which in terms of Communist aesthetics was dominated by Zhdanovist theories, raises the issue of the place and role which the PCF assigned to artists and intellectuals, and therefore of the PCF's key role in French film culture. This aspect will be dealt with by looking at the French Communist critical reception of French cinema. This examination constitutes the second, complementary dimension of this work. The PCF's expectations of cinema will be investigated, its critical, aesthetic and thematic preferences analysed. Further, the difficulties of reconciling the Party's position on the concept of auteur with its definition and defence of a national cinema will be a recurring point of focus in this section of the dissertation. The homogeneity or discrepancy between the Communist reception of French films and the PCF's own film policy, as well as between film critics and film professionals, will be underscored.

Combining these two aspects — film as an industry, i.e. the PCF's film policy and film as an art-form, i.e. the PCF's critical reception of film — this thesis aims to examine whether the PCF defined, advocated and set out to establish an alternative Marxist-Leninist cinema in France, thus giving priority to its place within the international Communist movement. Alternatively, did the Party use cinema as a means to anchor itself in the social, political, economic and cultural fabric of the country, thus favouring its specific national dimension and heritage, and ultimately emphasising its independence from the international Communist movement? It is only by answering these questions that an overall understanding of the relationship between the PCF and French cinema can be reached. As the focus of this dissertation is on French Communist film policy and criticism, I have not included a study of the representation of the PCF and of French Communists in French cinema. My principal concern is to document Communist attitudes to cinema; while I shall touch on the representation of the Party and its members, thorough discussion of this issue would require an extended study of its own.

Both the extent of the period under scrutiny and the dual approach of the study called for a chronological approach. The international Communist movement and the political landscape of France have undergone many changes since the Liberation. Similarly, French cinema has evolved through different stages in industrial as well as aesthetic terms. While shifts and changes within particular institutions cannot be classified as easily as specific historical events, it is possible nevertheless to divide the fifty-five years covered by this study into four different periods or eras: the short-lived Liberation era followed by the Cold War and its effects on France's Fourth Republic; the creation of the Fifth Republic; the May '68 events; and finally, François Mitterrand's era and its aftermath in the wider context of globalisation.

The Liberation period and the first stage of the Cold War — for many historians the Cold War ended with the fall of the Berlin Wall on 10 November 1989 — may be studied together since, as far as the PCF is concerned, the two periods are very much connected. For most of the late 1940s and 1950s the PCF was the first or second political party in France in electoral terms. Yet its position within French politics changed dramatically from the second half of 1947. After initially playing what it considered its rightful important role in the affairs of France, the PCF became isolated in the context of the entrenched divisions caused by the Cold War, when it fully adhered to Moscow's views. The PCF nevertheless played its part in the reorganisation of the film industry. In the first chapter I shall look at French Communist involvement in the reorganisation of the film trade, then study the developments of the PCF's film policy before and after the start of the Cold War, which coincided with the first initiatives towards a united Europe. The effect of the Party's popularity among the industry's professionals which resulted from the campaigns for the defence of French cinema spearheaded by the PCF, as well as the political use the Party may have derived from such a good reputation will also be examined.

In French film history, the late 1940s and the 1950s comprise the period when the terms *tradition de qualité* and *politique des auteurs* were coined and the two leading French film journals *Cahiers du cinéma* and *Positif* were founded. Although critical and theoretical writings had already featured prominently before the Second World War, the

post-war period was marked by an extraordinary resurgence of critical interest in film.¹⁴ The second chapter of this thesis examines the film aesthetics which the PCF promoted before and within the context of reigning Zhdanovism. The PCF's attitude towards French cinema will be discussed in the context of the anti-Americanism triggered by the Cold War. This cannot be done without discussing New Realism, the PCF's own version of Socialist Realism which the Party tried to promote. The Party's insistence on film-content and its rejection of formalism opposed, for most of the years 1946-1956, the Communist critics, led by the then influential film historian Georges Sadoul, to the promoters of auteur theory, led by André Bazin, but not forming an homogeneous group.

In the late 1950s the Fourth Republic gave way to the Fifth and a new constitution. General de Gaulle returned to power in a country which was at war with Algeria, one of the remaining colonies of the expiring French colonial empire. The PCF was the main opponent to both De Gaulle and the new constitution. It was also very critical of the Treaty of Rome which established the Common Market. Regarding French cinema, the setting up of the '*Avances sur recettes*' system, a financial aid to film directors, was one of André Malraux's first measures after the film sector became part of the portfolio of the Minister for Cultural Affairs. Due to maverick production choices, the eruption of the New Wave, which was to have a lasting effect on French cinema as well as a considerable influence outside France, led to tensions within the film trade while the film sector as a whole began to feel the consequences of a rapidly emerging consumer society. The third chapter will analyse how the PCF reacted to these new developments within the French film industry, and the fourth examine the reasons for, and the reactions to, Communist critics' positive reception of the New Wave. This reception marked a clear departure from their previous critical stance as well as leading to the first signs of a division between Communist critics and Communist film professionals. In spite of the PCF's less dogmatic approach, the Party's critics were attacked from other left-wing quarters. The substance of these disputes is also investigated in chapter four.

The fifth and sixth chapters centre on the May '68 events which saw the foundations of the Fifth Republic shaken as never before nor since. Although French cinema resisted

¹⁴ See Richard Abel, ed., *French Film Theory and Criticism: A History/Anthology 1907-1939*, 2 vols, (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1988).

rather well compared to other European industries, it was once more declared in crisis. This crisis, which originated in a steep decline in viewing figures, also coincided with a wider dissatisfaction among film professionals. Inept governmental decisions on censorship and film institutions such as the Cinémathèque française, coupled with high unemployment and fear of the effects of European integration, led to a worsening situation which culminated in May '68. Amidst the near-revolutionary situation of the country, the film trade considered its future and the reorganisation of its institutions. The utopian atmosphere of May '68 dominated the discussions, though little was achieved in terms of concrete transformation. The fifth chapter will examine the PCF's involvement in, and positions on, the different episodes leading to the uprising in French cinema which coincided with the wider political upheavals in May '68. The film policy supported by the Party during the forums organised by film professionals will be considered in the context of the emergence of more radical left-wing views on the industry. This highlights the difficulties experienced by some film professionals in reconciling their radical political philosophy and the reality of an industrial art-form deeply rooted in a capitalist market economy.

While the events of May '68 led to a diversification of the film industry, with different sectors protecting their interests, their effects on film criticism and film theory proved even more far-reaching. Notwithstanding earlier Marxist approaches regarding 'the seventh art', Marxism burst into the realm of film criticism and film theory in the 1960s with a vengeance. The position of the PCF will be examined, bearing in mind that, two years before May '68, it formally confirmed the more open stance towards intellectuals and artists it had in fact already begun to show with the New Wave. The Party's theoretical positions will be explored in the light of both the development of diverse forms of political cinema in France and other theories also inspired by Marxist principles.

The last two chapters deal with the 1990s. France, like every other country in the world, is faced with the issue of globalisation and its economic, social, political and ideological consequences. Following the demise of Communism, the world seems to be obeying one single rule, that of global market economy. In what appears at first sight an almost anachronistic position, the PCF has sat since June 1997 in the government of

France, both a member-state and a keen supporter of the European Union. In order for this to have become possible, the French Communist Party has had to enter a period of self-questioning and considerable change, in particular in the aftermath of the bitter experience of the 1980s which saw a seemingly unstoppable decline of the PCF in every aspect, electorally and culturally, locally and nationally. The French film sector is also considering its future in the context of the new international order. The seventh chapter analyses the way the French film trade has reacted to the new situation, and investigate how and why the PCF has redoubled its efforts in its campaign for the defence of French cinema in the context of international commercial negotiations such as GATT or MAI. Shaking off old corporatist habits, the PCF is now wholeheartedly supporting the independent sector; this support is echoed by the stance of Communist critics in the second half of the 1990s, the subject of the eighth and final chapter of this dissertation.

My examination of the relationship between the PCF and French cinema between 1944 and 1999 will show how important the Party has been for French cinema and how questionable the benefits of this involvement have been for the Party. This study shows that it would be misleading to judge the Communist position on French film solely by the Stalinist yardstick as is often the case. Although the Stalinist years have permanently affected the PCF as well as one's perception of the PCF, the Party's discourse on film has changed dramatically since the 1950s, albeit at different moments according to one's viewpoint — critical or industrial. Moreover an analysis of Communist views on French film shows that these have not always been unanimous. There have been significant differences of opinion on French cinema within the Party. While critics were anxious to shake off the Zhdanovist discourse, their positions from the late 1950s on were often ahead of the stance taken by the Communists within the industry. It has taken over forty years to see French Communists talking in one voice on film matters. During the PCF's heyday, the Party's policy regarding film or other art-forms centred on the idea of national culture. Economic considerations often played their part in the PCF's reception of films, although as early as the New Wave, some critics — first and foremost Sadoul himself — began to reconsider their positions and found themselves at odds with their comrades employed in the film trade. In the 1990s, the emphasis on the national values of

French cinema has been replaced by a full endorsement of independent films and auteurs. The new place of the PCF on the national political and economic scene following the collapse of Eastern European Communism has played its part in this evolution. Indeed the complex relationship between the PCF and the French nation has proved a crucial factor in the way French Communists dealt with French cinema. Yet at the end of the twentieth century it seems impossible to say that the PCF has drawn any lasting political benefit from its unstinting involvement in French cinema.

Methodology and Sources

Before looking at the sources an important point needs to be made about the specificity of this research. As Communist historian Roger Martelli underlines, few studies dealing in one way or another with the PCF are free from the consequences of their authors' specific emotional and passionate involvement with the subject.¹⁵ Thus many histories of the PCF or personal accounts of involvement with the Party at one point or another have been written by people who at the time of writing were or had been members of the PCF. The writer's standpoint may then range from being sympathetic, apologetic or supportive of the Party to being mildly to highly critical of it, or even unequivocally anti-PCF. On the whole, ex-Party members tend to be critical of the organisation which they left willingly or unwillingly but always as a result of their disagreement with the PCF's positions at a given time. The difficulty in distancing oneself from a Party which exerts such an influence on both one's way of life and one's way of looking at the world has been testified to by those who belong(ed) to the PCF.¹⁶ Coming from a French Communist background myself without having experienced any personal trauma after leaving the Party at a rather young age, I have managed hopefully to retain an objective perspective on my subject-matter. But the emotional dimension of this particular field of

¹⁵ Roger Martelli, *Communisme français : Histoire sincère du PCF* (Paris: Messidor/Éditions sociales, 1984), back cover.

¹⁶ On the Communist way of life, see Gérard Vincent, "Communism as a way of life", in *A History of Private Life*, vol. 5, 'Riddles of Identity in Modern Times', ed. by Antoine Prost and Gérard Vincent, trans. by Arthur Goldhammer, (Cambridge, Mass.; London: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 1991), pp. 315-45; Roger Martelli, 'Peut-on parler d'une culture communiste?', *Société française*, 47 (July-August-September 1993), 40-46; Marc Lazar, 'L'invention et la désagrégation de la culture communiste', *Vingtième Siècle*, 44 (December 1994), 9-18.

research is also manifest in historians' accounts even when they are less intimately involved with their object of investigation. Thus in the preface to their analysis of the PCF in the Fifth Republic, Bell and Criddle emphasise their personal attitude to the object of their study: 'The PCF has been in essence a totalitarian party dedicated to the success of Soviet-type systems. It is therefore difficult to avoid being judgmental and we have not hidden our distaste for the form of politics practised by the PCF'. In spite of this, they claim that their conclusions are based on objective facts: 'Whilst our interpretation of the Party's behaviour is often at odds with the Party's view of itself, it is consistent with the historical reality.'¹⁷ In the realm of French film, similar impassioned attitudes seem to prevail when the PCF enters the picture. The very different response I received from three French film personalities — film directors Jean Dréville and Jean Delannoy and actor-director Michel Piccoli — not only confirmed the emotional impact of the PCF on film professionals, thanks to its passionate — and controversial — character, but also confirmed the validity of the present study.¹⁸

My approach is on the whole empirical. I have sought to document the important links between French cinema and the PCF at both institutional and critical levels. As the object of this research is to examine the PCF's stance on French film over the second half of the twentieth century, the main source of information on the PCF's positions has proved to be the Communist press. Thanks to the clear links between the PCF and its press, the Party's publications have offered a clear indication of the Party's official position(s) on any given subject over the years. Whether a Communist journalist later disavows what he/she has written in a previous period is irrelevant in the context of this research. As Émile Breton pointed out following Samuel Fuller's death, it is easy and uninteresting to mock one's colleagues' earlier papers instead of acknowledging one's own erring judgement.¹⁹ Indeed few Communist critics would subscribe today to what their predecessors wrote forty-five years ago. More interesting is trying to find out why they wrote it then and why they would not do so now. As shall be seen in the core of this dissertation, to rely mostly on the Communist press does not necessarily imply a

¹⁷ D. S. Bell and Byron Criddle, *The French Communist Party in the Fifth Republic* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1994), preface.

¹⁸ See appendices 1, 2 & 3, pp. 343-48.

¹⁹ Émile Breton, 'Samuel Fuller, quarante ans après', *L'Humanité*, 24 December 1997, p. 20.

monolithic Communist response to French film. While personal testimonies on every aspect of this research would have been difficult to obtain given the extent of the period covered, archival material has proved extremely useful in defining and refining a view of Communist positions at specific moments, for instance during the New Wave era. Thus Communist film historian Georges Sadoul's and Communist director Jean-Paul Le Chanois's personal archives, which deserve further exploration, contain original manuscripts of articles which show noteworthy discrepancies between the first drafts and the versions published in the Communist press, as well as rare Communist internal memoranda which allow for a clearer overall view of the Communist stance on film.

As the representation of the PCF or of Party members in French cinema does not fall within the remit of this thesis, the use of films has been limited to a number of examples whose reception characterises the PCF's critical approach at a given time. Thus the reception of Jean Grémillon's *L'Amour d'une femme* was symptomatic of the Communist standpoint during the Cold War. Similarly, Claude Berri's *Germinal* marked a turning point in the Communist critical discourse of the 1990s.

Part I

The Liberation and the Cold War

Chapter 1: Film Policy: The Liberation and the Cold War

1.1. The Liberation: The Battle for the Control of the French Film Industry

On 26 August 1944, around 4 p.m., General de Gaulle's procession drove from the Arc de Triomphe to Notre-Dame for 'the coronation day', marking the liberation of Paris.¹ As soon as the General stepped into the Cathedral, gunshots resounded from all directions somewhat disturbing the solemnity of the occasion. Was there a threat from German snipers or Vichy desperadoes or was this the new edition of 'murder in the cathedral',² namely a sign of the conflicts which ran through the French Resistance? The analysis de Gaulle gave of these events in his *War Memoirs* ten years later after they took place points to the divisions of the French Resistance. The general blames those 'who wanted to justify the maintenance of revolutionary power and the deployment of physical force', he goes on to explain that 'an attempt had been made to create the impression that threats still lurked in the shadows, and the resistance organisations must remain armed and vigilant, that COMAC,³ the Parisian Liberation Committee (CPL) and the neighbourhood committees were still to take the responsibility for police action, justice and the purging of collaborators in order to protect the people against dangerous conspiracies.'⁴ Jean Lacouture rightly draws attention to the fact that 'Communist tactics could hardly be described more clearly.'⁵

From the end of WW2 to the resignation of the General on 26 November 1969, the political relationship between the French Communist Party and de Gaulle and the Gaullist movement went from bad to worse. Still, in explicitly laying the blame on the Communist wing of the Resistance for the disturbances of 26 August 1944, de Gaulle gave a clear

¹ Jean Lacouture, *De Gaulle - The Ruler, 1945-1970* (London: Harvill, 1991), p. 3.

² Ibid., p. 4.

³ Commission of Military Action of the National Council of the Resistance.

⁴ Lacouture, p. 4.

⁵ Ibid.

indication of the difficulties he already had to face at the end of Summer 1944, although he does so more acrimoniously than he would probably have in the aftermath of the day itself.⁶

The liberation of Paris metonymically illustrated the dual nature of the Liberation forces operating in — and out of — the country at large. Paris, once described as the largest maquis in France, was liberated between 18 and 26 August 1944, thanks to a popular insurrection which prepared the grounds for the safe entrance of General Leclerc's Second D.B. (Armoured Division) followed by the return of the 'Leader of the Free France'. Broadly speaking two camps played a role in the liberation: the PCF and its sympathisers which had prepared the insurrection, and the Gaullists behind Leclerc and his troops; two opposing poles sharing the same goal of ridding France of Nazi Germany and the Vichy traitors but with different philosophical and political views on the future of the liberated homeland. As soon as the Resistance started to organise, it did so broadly along two independent lines. Firstly, de Gaulle's *appel du 18 juin* 1941 gave the signal for the reconquest from abroad (London and Algiers) but, more significantly, legitimised the General's image as leader of the 'Free France' very early in the conflict. Secondly, after the vacillations which followed the Russo-German pact, the French Communist Party became the most active political organisation in the struggle against the occupying forces within the borders of the country, although it must be added that a number of Resistance groups operating inside France were stern Socialist and Gaullist followers. The terrible ordeals the PCF's members and fellow-travellers went through during the clandestine struggle and the heavy toll they paid in terms of human losses — *Le parti des 75 000 fusillés* — as well as the remarkable efficiency of its actions, brought the PCF a new legitimacy. In 1944, the Communists and de Gaulle's partisans could either fight against each other in search of gaining overall power, thus taking the risk of prolonging the conflict, or else join forces to bring the war to an end and prepare the political and institutional future of the nation. The latter was the chosen option offering

⁶ De Gaulle plays the events down in a letter to Henri Queuille dated 27 August 1944: 'The shoot out at Notre-Dame was, I think, a mere farce. Many people (FFI and others) were carrying arms. Stirred up by the street fights of the previous days, they were ready to start shooting at the roofs. The first shot unleashed a frantic gunfight. But we'll fix that later', Charles de Gaulle, *Lettres, notes et carnets, juin 1943-mai 1945* (Paris: Plon, 1983), p. 298.

France, albeit for only a few years, a semblance of political stability in spite of insurmountable divisions and widely divergent aims.

The relationship between the two legitimised powers emerging from the Resistance years, the Gaullists and the PCF, proved strained and tempestuous. On 28 October 1944, for instance, De Gaulle, the head of a provisional government of twenty-one Ministers of which two were Communists, ordered the disbanding of the *milices* and *gardes patriotiques*. To no avail. Both the PCF and the CNR (*Conseil National de la Résistance*), which controlled those Resistance-born armed groups, ignored the order. To use Philippe Robrieux's words, the country was, between August and November 1944, in a situation of '*double pouvoir*'.⁷ On 11 November 1944, the Party organised a massive demonstration in Paris to demonstrate its strength. In the aftermath of the liberation, the PCF enjoyed unprecedented popularity for two main reasons. Its heroic participation in the struggle against Nazi Germany and the heavy price the USSR had to pay during the war led many to join the ranks of the Party.⁸ The trial of strength with the Gaullists was eventually brought to an end in January 1945, when Maurice Thorez gave in by publicly calling for 'one State, one army, one police'.⁹ This signalled not only the demise of the *milices patriotiques* but also of the *Comités de libération* which heretofore had competed with the authority of the State, in particular in provinces such as Limousin or the Toulouse area, which were administered by Communist-led maquis, by-passing the prefects.¹⁰ Historians argue that Stalin did not look favourably on the prospect of France becoming a socialist country since it would have gone against the balance of power devised at the Yalta meeting. There is no real evidence either to suggest that the PCF was ever actually in a position to demand power and hold on to it. The issue of the balance of power between Gaullists and Communists in the country as a whole would strike anyone by its similarity with the situation within the French film industry in the aftermath of the Liberation of France.

⁷ Philippe Robrieux, *Histoire intérieure du Parti communiste*, vol. 2 (1945-72) (Paris: Fayard, 1981), pp. 76-77.

⁸ Ibid., pp. 43-44.

⁹ Ibid., pp. 83-85.

¹⁰ Ibid., pp. 35-42.

One of the key factors behind the efficiency displayed by the Communist resisters and the clandestine PCF as a whole was their ability to create a network of organisations operating under their control. Setting up pockets of resistance in every section of French society, the PCF managed to gain recognition for its participation in the struggle for freedom in all quarters of France. As I shall now examine, the French film trade was one of the terrains where the struggle for power took place between Communists and Gaullists as well as an area where the Communist stronghold ensured the Party's lasting influence on the film industry.

1.1.1. The *Comité de Libération du Cinéma Français* (CLCF)

The last gunshots of the Paris insurrection could still be heard when the city's inhabitants were already flocking to the cinema to watch, indeed to relive, the events which took place between 18 and 26 August 1944.¹¹ From the first street fights of the insurrection to the arrival of the Leclerc division the thirty-seven minutes long first issue of *France-Libre-Actualités* offered Parisians a comprehensive and often moving account of the Liberation they had so long desired.¹² The film *La Libération de Paris* may be considered as the first post-war French film, in so far as it was, for a few weeks, the only new French film being shown in Paris after the insurrection.¹³ That cinemas were granted enough electricity to project it while public transport was still waiting to operate again is clear evidence of the importance given to this documentary.¹⁴ More significantly, *La Libération de Paris* was the

¹¹ 'Un film sur l'insurrection', *L'Humanité*, n° 9, 24 August 1944.

¹² 'Le film sur l'insurrection montrera au monde comment Paris s'est battu', *L'Humanité*, 24 August 1944. For a fuller account of the film, see Claire Vervin, 'La caméra sous les balles, comment fut tourné *Paris se libère*', in *Les Lettres Françaises*, n° 20, 9 September 1944, p. 6.

¹³ The film is known under different titles: *La Libération de Paris*, *Paris se libère*, *Le Film de la Libération de Paris*, *France-Actualités-Libre*, n° 1. 'The film of the Paris insurrection is now being shown in four cinemas in Paris, everyday from 6 pm to 9 pm: Gaumont-Palace, Normandie, Cinéma des Batignolles, 59, Rue la Condamine et Savoie, 179, Boulevard Voltaire. Comrades, go and relive this adventure, splendidly conveyed by the France Libre film. The latest allied film news is being shown at the same screening', 'Le film de l'insurrection', *L'Humanité*, n° 26, 15 septembre 1944.

¹⁴ See Jean-Pierre Bertin-Maghit, *Le Cinéma français sous l'occupation* (Paris: Olivier Orban, 1989), p. 189.

first concrete achievement of the *Comité de Libération Cinéma français* (CLCF) since it came to existence.¹⁵

The *Comité de Libération du Cinéma français* was set up at the beginning of 1944, when different Resistance groups, foreseeing a victorious outcome to the war, decided to join forces in order to prepare the insurrection of the cinema trade. The coming together, under the aegis of the *Conseil National de la Résistance* (CNR), of the *Front National*, *l'Union des syndicats*, *les Milices patriotiques*, *Les Comités populaires d'entreprises*, *les Employeurs patriotiques*, *le Mouvement des prisonniers et déportés* and *Les Communistes du Cinéma* allowed the industry to organise itself with four goals in mind; two short-term ones, namely the occupation and requisition of the premises of the different state film bodies or unions as well as film companies headquarters, plus the making of a film relating the liberation of the French capital; and two medium to long-term ones: the purging of the trade of collaborators and the reorganisation of the infrastructure of the French film industry as a whole. The PCF, either through its members or its sympathisers, was behind many an organisation which were part of the CLCF. Indeed, the PCF was as active within the cinema trade as in any other sector where the Resistance had to be organised.

As early as September 1941, Jean-Paul Le Chanois, a film director who had joined the PCF in 1933, founded a *Comité de Salut Public du Cinéma Français*, organising the distribution of propaganda leaflets or sending photos of occupied Paris to London.¹⁶ Communist involvement with this group became manifest in the first months of 1943, when Le Chanois was given the task of reactivating the cinema branch of the *Confédération Générale du Travail* (CGT). Most of his clandestine activities had to do with rebuilding a strong film trade union that would be well prepared and sufficiently powerful to face the challenges a liberated industry would inevitably encounter.

Alongside Le Chanois's own clandestine network, the cinema section of the PCF-born *Front National*, a Resistance movement which appealed mainly to French intellectuals,

¹⁵ On the CLCF, see Sylvie Lindeperg, *Les Écrans de l'ombre* (Paris: Éditions du CNRS, 1997), pp. 23-60.

¹⁶ Jean-Paul Le Chanois's real name was Jean-Paul Dreyfus. 'Le Chanois is his mother's name. Originally from Ireland, the family, whose name was Okanorus, fled the Protestant persecutions and landed in France in 1752. The name is gallicised during the Révolution', Bertin-Maghit, p. 214.

began operating in 1941 and established contacts, albeit distant and unfriendly, with Le Chanois's group. Headed by René Blech, a Communist writer, the Front National Cinema section attracted directors (Louis Daquin, Jacques Becker, Claude Autant-Lara, Jean Grémillon, André Zwoboda, Jean Delannoy) — actors (Pierre Blanchar, André Luguet, Jean Mercanton) — writers (Armand Salacrou, Bernard Zimmer) and technicians coming from every avenue of the anti-Vichy political spectrum, from Communism to right-wing anarchism. The PCF was nevertheless spearheading the organisation, giving its different initiatives an ideological slant.

In December 1943, the stencilled six-page first issue of *L'Écran français* was published by the cinema section of the *Front National*. The editorial board, directed by René Blech, was composed of the directors and actors as well as film writers.¹⁷ Its first editorial encapsulated the ideological position of the CLCF and offered a brief insight into the policies it would advocate at the time of the Liberation.¹⁸ To begin with, the article established the good credentials of French cinema during the German occupation: 'those of us who deserve to be called directors never indulged in anti-France propaganda'. Yet some within the trade had fallen low and collaborated with the enemy, be it Vichy or Nazi Germany, so French cinema 'must rid itself of its parasites and its traitors' to allow French cinema to recover its unimpaired national identity and allow it to develop within a clearly identified French framework. In two pages were enunciated both the concept of purges and the idea of a French cinema that would be a vehicle for national pride, culture and prestige. Whereas the purge was by essence to be limited in time, cinema as part of the national cultural heritage was to remain, from then on, a leitmotiv in the everlasting debate on French cinema, readily recognised by the PCF as one of its own.

On 19 August 1944 the CLCF launched the insurrection of the cinema sector. The *Direction générale du cinéma*, the COIC, IDHEC as well as the headquarters of *France-Actualités* were the first targets and their offices swiftly occupied. The Resistance fighters of

¹⁷ Pierre Blanchar, André Luguet, Jean Mercanton, Louis Daquin, Jacques Becker, André Zwoboda, Armand Salacrou, Marc-Gilbert Sauvageon and Bernard Zimmer among others.

¹⁸ *L'Écran français*, n° 1, December 1943, pp. 1-2.

the CLCF, Jean-Pierre Bertin-Maghit explains, were not alone in aiming for the COIC. Members of the Gaullist resistance group 'Opera', civil servants, many of whom were employed by the very same public boards they were now raiding, had also planned to occupy the premises, in which they were already based. Another example of the dichotomous nature of French resistance, the CLCF and the 'Opera' group had never met until 19 August 1944, the Communist-led Committee having always looked at its Gaullist counterpart with great suspicion.¹⁹

By 20 August 1944, 8 p.m., a number of offices had fallen into the Resistance's hands. And so had, in addition to those quoted earlier, Unions organisations, German-controlled firms such as the production company, Continental, the distribution company, Tobis, and the SOGEC exhibition network as well as the Buttes-Chaumont studios and laboratories. The CLCF lost three men in the battle, one of whom was the actor Aimos, shot on 25 August 1944 in Batignolles, while fifteen of its men sustained injuries.²⁰

The power struggle between Communists and Gaullists was matched by a power struggle within the CLCF. Dissensions between the Union resistance network led by Le Chanois and the *Front National* led by René Blech were apparent from the early days of the organisation. It reached crisis point in the immediate aftermath of the insurrection when Jean-Paul Le Chanois did not attend the meeting for the selection of the CLCF's executive committee and board. For the PCF, Le Chanois's involvement with Continental barred him from the direction of the Committee. Backed by Aragon, Louis Daquin was then elected general secretary. The Party had put in place a man who had been and still was closer to the leadership of the Party than Le Chanois.²¹

Once the CLCF was in place, and its executive boards appointed, the short-term goals had been successfully completed, the Committee was now able to tackle the issues of purging and reorganising the industry and thus assume power in the French film industry.²² Or was it ?

¹⁹ Bertin-Maghit, pp. 178-179.

²⁰ Paul Légise, *Histoire de la politique du cinéma français, II: Le Cinéma entre deux Républiques [1940-1946]* (Paris: Filméditations/Pierre Lherminier, 1977), pp. 112-113.

²¹ Bertin-Maghit, p. 189-190.

²² 'The *Comité de direction* is composed of its chairman, Pierre Blanchar (actor and director), Becker, Daquin (film directors); Maurette, Mère (assistant directors); Pierre Bost (writer); Lemare (cameraman); Laroche

1.1.2. The CLCF and the Purges

Speaking at a public meeting at the Mutualité on 2 September 1944, Jacques Duclos, the PCF's acting general secretary in the absence of Maurice Thorez, who did not return from Moscow until 27 November 1944, called for severe purges: 'Workers are not unjustified in their refusal to work with bosses, managers or executives who, during the Kraut occupation behaved as the enemy's agents. All those who either dealt with the enemy or were involved in policies practiced by collaborating governments must be ousted from both the public and private sectors. [...] Any delay in the punishment of the traitors and the purging of both the State and the private sector will lead to disorder and to a weakening of the nation.'²³ What those strong words implied is simple enough to guess: only those who were uncompromised with the enemy, in other words those active in the Resistance could legitimately take over the positions of control and power which purges would inevitably leave vacant. Hence the necessary presence of the Communists in this process which was 'a fight against economic sabotage, at the head of which the Party must be present as it has been in the fight for national liberation'.²⁴

The call for purges had long been a priority for the Communist Resistance. In a January 1944 clandestine issue of *Femmes françaises*, published by *France d'Abord*,²⁵ chaperoned therefore by the PCF, an article demands tough action against French women who betray both their sex and their country, singling out the actress Arletty:²⁶

(assistant-cameraman); Mercanton (chief-editor); Houdet, Protat (electricians); Pignault (effects man); Germaine Berger, Couty (film workers); Daguest (laboratory employee); Knabel (projectionnist); O'Connel, Senamaud, Jay, Segard, Desfontaines (producers); Daniaux (laboratory executive); Dervoux, Schoubrenner (distributors); Aubin, Philippot (cinema owners); Bardonnnet (film societies). The executive board is composed of Pierre Blanchar, chairman; René Houdet, Marcel Segard, deputy chairmen; Louis Daquin, general secretary; Marc Maurette, deputy secretary-general; Raymond Bardonnnet, treasurer; Jacques Lemare, deputy treasurer', Bertin-Maghit, p. 315.

²³ Jacques Duclos, *La Lutte des communistes pour gagner la guerre et reconstruire la France*, pp. 16-17, in Robrieux, vol. 2, p. 70.

²⁴ Ibid.

²⁵ *France d'Abord* was the journal of the Resistance organisation, Forces Françaises de l'Intérieur-Partisans de France (FFI -PF), which was close to the PCF.

²⁶ Arletty had also been accused and ridiculed in the first issue of *L'Écran français* — 'At the time the armistice was signed with Italy, there was a rumour in Nice that the Americans were landing in Genoa. At the Victorine film studios, Miss Arletty, pallid and lyrical with fear, declared to those who were obviously delighted by the news: "If you are naive enough to think that the Americans are going to give you Packards and dollars, you'd better think twice. Personally, I am more realistic..." The same day, the Lady fled to Paris

Having underlined the importance of the role played by French women in the Resistance, it is nonetheless necessary, in spite of our sadness and our disgust, to point out those of our countrywomen who have submitted to the enemy and are engaged in helping him carry out his infamous activities.

This will be a regular feature of our publication. *We believe it is our role to publicly stigmatize those few women who have made themselves forever unworthy to be called French and deserve the same punishment meted out to traitors.*

For their benefit, let us mention the all too famous Arletty, who is now the mistress of a German colonel, and who declares with unforgivable impudence: 'I am crazy about this man. If Germany loses the war, I'll follow him to the end of the earth'. This might be the best way for Miss Arletty to escape our anger.'²⁷ (my emphasis)

Arletty would eventually appear in front of a purging committee on 6 November 1944. Fortunately for French cinema, she was spared the kind of punishment *Femmes françaises* advocated earlier in the year.²⁸

The first editorial of *L'Écran français*, which advocated the purging of the film trade, anticipated both Jacques Duclos's speech and Arletty's fate. As Bertin-Maghit explains in great detail in his thorough analysis of the *Épuration*, 'In September 1944 the CLCF was busy establishing committees ready to operate according to rules set up in clandestinity.'²⁹ These spontaneous jurisdictions claimed their integrity, as guarantors of republican justice.³⁰ Backed up by the provisional Under-Secretary for Information, the card-carrying Jean Guignebert, the CLCF was able to draw up a list of suspended directors as early as 4 September 1944, among whom were Henri-Georges Clouzot and Marcel Carné. Two articles, one published by *Les Lettres françaises*, a Communist-influenced cultural weekly, the other in *L'Humanité*, conveyed the spirit that presided over the purges. The first one

to her German colonel's bed and her stolen cars', 'Si vous n'aimez pas ça', *L'Écran français*, December 1943, p. 2.

²⁷ 'Celles qui trahissent', *Femmes Françaises*, published by *France d'Abord*, January 1944.

²⁸ 'Summoned to a revolutionary style room in the Rue de Valois, I felt like Charlotte Corday, judged not by my peers, but by second-rate underlings in rolled-up sleeves. The meeting was chaired by Lurville of the *Union des artistes*. My lawyer, Maître Jacques Moutet, represented me. Marie, my personal maid, was summoned as a witness. Her behaviour and evidence were irreproachable. I got away with an "official warning" and signed with Vondas', Arletty, *La Défense* (Paris: La Table Ronde, 1971), p. 176. True to character, Arletty had the audacity — and the curiosity — to be present at the National Assembly for the return of Maurice Thorez: 'I attended Maurice Thorez's return to the National Assembly. There was not a single seat free', *ibid.*, p. 176.

²⁹ Bertin-Maghit, pp. 191-239.

³⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 191.

mocked the artists who ‘behaved somewhat foolishly during the last four years’ predicting their drift into oblivion, even though their films might retain some measure of fame.³¹ The second article related the students’ demand to oust the director of the well-known *École de Photo et de Cinéma* in the rue de Vaugirard: ‘Will the decision ever be taken by the powers that be to “purge” Mr Montel ?’³²

The CLCF was zealously engaged in the purging of the trade. Yet the way purges were or should be handled was also a source of division among the Resistance. Bertin-Maghit stresses that:

From August 1944 onwards, the film industry was characterised by two ideologies. On the one hand de Gaulle wished that the admittedly necessary purges take place on a small scale. France should not show the Americans the spectacle of a country at war with itself, but on the contrary of a country dressing its wounds with dignity and embarking on a programme of economic reconstruction in peace and harmony. On the other hand, the CLCF and the unions affiliated to the CGT’s *Fédération du Spectacle*, composed mainly of zealous card-carriers, demanded large-scale purges. For them, it was the sine qua non condition for the establishment of the revolutionary process which would soon replace capitalism with a regime based on social justice and which would oust those who favoured the supremacy of the powerful economic trusts.³³

Thus on 23 September 1944 Louis Daquin published a long plea for the continuation of the purging process in *Les Lettres françaises*, where he wonders whether ‘there was not even some deft manoeuvring at work to discredit the very principle of the purges itself’.³⁴ For Daquin, if French cinema wanted to gain its rightful status in the world, ‘it needed a veritable film industry policy — a policy which would be beyond personal interests and which would be free from those who until now have used cinema as mere financial speculation’.³⁵ The purging process was marred by numerous excesses and inconsistencies. Whereas about five thousand files were examined by the purging committees, members of the CLCF, all ex-*résistants*, were spared appearing in front of their fellow-workers turned judges.³⁶ This

³¹ C. ‘Du studio à l’écran’, *Les Lettres françaises*, n° 24, 7 October 1944, p. 7.

³² *L’Humanité*, n° 113, 24-25 December 1944.

³³ Bertin-Maghit, p. 240.

³⁴ Louis Daquin, ‘L’Écran français’, *Les Lettres françaises*, n° 22, 23 September 1944, p. 7.

³⁵ Ibid.

³⁶ Pierre Billard, *L’Âge classique du cinéma français* (Paris: Flammarion, 1995), p. 433.

inevitably caused some concern if not mistrust: were the people staffing the CLCF purge committees all so perfect? For instance, Roger Richebé, who, as *ex-délégué général* du COIC, had been a ‘victim’ of the purge commission established by the CLCF,³⁷ mentioned having had professional dealings with Louis Daquin, the CLCF’s secretary general, who had to admit having had contacts with Alfred Greven with a view to producing a newsreel magazine in occupied France.³⁸

All in all, the purges did not go half as far as the early stern commitments of the CLCF would have led one to believe.³⁹ The CLCF purge commissions would be replaced by official ones, set up in October 1944 but operational in Winter 1945, with the CLCF losing its suspensive powers.⁴⁰ The marginalisation of the CLCF was partly the result of Henri Ullmann’s research to show that the leading Communist figures of the CLCF (Pierre Blanchard, Jean-Paul Le Chanois, Louis Daquin), were not beyond reproach.⁴¹ As a Gaullist, Ullmann’s intelligence work bears testimony to the fact that the Gaullists and Communists’ trial of strength was felt everywhere. In the case of the purges, the Communists had to admit defeat. A year after the liberation, Guy Leclerc, a film critic with the Communist daily *L’Humanité*, while reviewing Christian-Jaque’s *Boule de Suif*,⁴² clearly echoed the CLCF’s disappointment and discouragement at the limited scale of the purges: ‘As it is, the

³⁷ Roger Richebé blamed the Communists for this: he accused particular members of the Committee. They included Louis Daquin ‘who attacked me publicly’, Henri Jeanson and Christian-Jaque. He accused the Communist Party as a whole, which ‘obtained a sanction against me which will be cancelled by the Council of State’, in Roger Richebé, *Au delà de l’écran, 70 ans de la vie d’un cinéaste* (Monte-Carlo: Pastorelly, 1977), pp. 167, 170, 171-172, 174.

³⁸ Having been sent to France under the auspices of Goering, Alfred Greven was extremely powerful. He presided over an umbrella society incorporating Continental, the ACE (Alliance cinématographique européenne) and the SOGEC, Billard, p. 363; *ibid.*, p. 434. This is how Daquin relates the period forty-five years later: ‘The COIC was controlled by Vichy. The producer Raoul Ploquin was appointed head of the COIC together with Guy de Carmoy, who represented the government and who would be deported eighteen months later. De Carmoy called me and told me that it was essential to get Film News out of the Germans’ hands. This was literally impossible. However I agreed to see to it. Three months later at the end of 1941, the protocol on Film News was signed and I realised that the choice was either to become a collaborationist or to be sent to jail’, Frantz Gévaudan, ‘Quarante ans de cinéma français, évocation 1: Louis Daquin’, *Cinéma 79*, n° 241, January 1979, pp. 27-40.

³⁹ ‘Out of 60 000 people, about 1000 were charged by the committee, which discharged half of them and simply gave an official warning to the other half. A little over 250 people were given more serious sanctions, which for most of them consisted of a temporary professional ban. Thus Clouzot was banned for life until his ban was reduced to two years’, Billard, pp. 432-433. For a full account of the purges and a complete list of the sanctions, see Bertin-Maghit, pp. 191-239 and 393-436.

⁴⁰ Lindeperg, p. 54.

⁴¹ *Ibid.*

⁴² Incidentally *Boule de Suif* features on the front page of the n° 1 of *L’Écran français*, 4 July 1945.

film is both a small revenge and a consolation — very small indeed — for the failure of the purges.’⁴³

We have seen that Louis Daquin, as general secretary of the CLCF was very active in the purging process. He was also the strongest advocate of a reorganisation of the French film industry after the war. Let us now see whether he and the Communists met with more success there than they had had with the purges.

1.1.3. The CLCF and the Future of French Film

A film director who had joined the PCF in 1941, Louis Daquin was in fact the most ideologically driven card-carrying member of the CLCF. He presented the CLCF’s vision for the future of the film industry in a series of articles bearing the explicit title ‘Cinema with a clear conscience’ published in *L’Écran français*, which from March 1944, was incorporated in *Les Lettres françaises*:

The glorious task of rebuilding and reorganising their profession will be entrusted to those members of the Resistance who participated in the struggle selflessly and with no thought for their own safety, whose total dedication and moral conviction, without which no noble and lasting undertaking could be envisaged, never faltered. The task will be entrusted to those who at the same time defended their professional interests and spiritual heritage, all the while devoting themselves and their art to the liberation of France, their France and not the France of Pétain, Laval, Henriot, Déat or Doriot.⁴⁴

As Sylvie Lindeperg underlines: ‘beyond this catalogue of wishful thinking, the important thing here was therefore to set the tone for the post-war period’.⁴⁵ Moreover, what stands out most from this quotation is the proclamation of the sole legitimacy of those who had actively participated in the Resistance to claim the right to reorganise the industry when the war was over. Like the issue of the purges, that of the Resistance fighters as rightful

⁴³ *L’Humanité*, n° 378, 26 October 1945. On the issue of the film industry purges, see also Lindeperg, pp. 50-58.

⁴⁴ *Les Lettres françaises*, n° 17, June 1944, p. 3, and n° 18, July 1944, p. 3.

⁴⁵ Sylvie Lindeperg, *Images de la seconde guerre mondiale dans le cinéma français, 1944-1966*, doctoral thesis (Institut d’Études Politiques de Paris, 1993), p. 47.

contenders for the top jobs was taken up again by Jacques Duclos a few weeks later in that same public meeting at the *Mutualité*: ‘Today it is the Resistance which represents the nation — a clandestine Resistance which through its struggle has laid the foundations for a new legitimacy as opposed to the false legitimacy of Vichy. [...] Today the Resistance constitutes the legitimate basis of the provisional government of the Republic.’⁴⁶

The CLCF was indeed in a position of power by the end of August 1944. It was influential enough to have one of its members nominated as new *Directeur général de la cinématographie* to replace Louis-Émile Galey.⁴⁷ The son of an *ex-Président du conseil* and an innovative science film-maker, Jean Painlevé had been a strong antifascist militant, close to the Surrealist circles. He had also been in touch with Le Chanois when the resistance was beginning to take shape.⁴⁸ The CLCF’s plan for the future of the film industry was tinged with idealism or even naivety as Louis Daquin himself admitted in an interview to *Film Dope* in 1976: ‘...after the Liberation we wanted to create a nationalised sector of the industry, using ex-enemy property, the Billancourt studios. But we could not do it; in fact we were a bit naïve.’⁴⁹ In October he gave a full account of the activities and projects of the committee to a very supportive *L’Humanité*: ‘In my opinion — which naturally echoes that of the committee, it is an absolute necessity to snatch the film industry from the jaws of the trusts. It is essential for cinema to cease being the target of financial speculation if its intellectual and artistic standards are to be raised.’ Daquin stated his complete agreement with Jean Painlevé, adding that the ‘*Comité de Libération* would leave no stone unturned to complete successfully the reforms Painlevé has outlined’.⁵⁰ Two striking points come out of the interview. The first is the control exercised by the PCF, i.e. PCF = Daquin = CLCF = the profession as a whole. The second is that the revolutionary, anti-capitalist idealism which distinguished that period pervaded most of the interview. Bertin-Maghit describes the

⁴⁶ Duclos, p. 27, in Robrieux, p. 74.

⁴⁷ Towards the end of the Occupation, Louis-Émile Galey was head of both the COIC and the *Direction générale de la cinématographie*.

⁴⁸ Bertin-Maghit, p. 174.

⁴⁹ Jean-Pierre Berthomé, ‘Interview with Louis Daquin’, *Film Dope*, n° 9, April 1976, p. 6.

⁵⁰ ‘Pour la renaissance du cinéma français, Louis Daquin propose’, *L’Humanité*, n° 62, 27 October 1944.

programme of the CLCF in rather broad terms. Speaking for the industry as a whole, the CLCF expressed a wish for the State to show more concern for the cinema and called for a comprehensive economic and financial policy which would make the necessary technical means available to the cinema so that it could become one of the country's leading industries. The committee's members are 'ready to place the future of French cinema in the hands of the government and the professionals'.⁵¹ In other words, the CLCF 'wanted to see that the principles agreed during the clandestine Resistance were fully enforced' and remained in place so that the spirit which characterised the Liberation may prevail.⁵² In October 1944, it drew up a list of detailed measures.⁵³ Almost a year later, it advocated only broad reforms.⁵⁴

Few of the CLCF's demands eventually materialised, for the simple reason that it never had a free hand. The future of the industry was decided elsewhere. If *L'Humanité* was prompt in expressing the Party's satisfaction after the nomination of Painlevé, the newspaper was as eager to voice its concern following the nomination of Pierre Riedinger as Painlevé's deputy.⁵⁵ From the beginning Jean Painlevé's appointment had serious political implications. Paul Léglise reminds us that 'as early as late August, the committee puts forward the name of

⁵¹ *Bulletin officiel du CLCF*, n° 1, 23 October 1944, p. 2, in Bertin-Maghit, p. 243.

⁵² Léglise, p. 124.

⁵³ A list of these measures was published in the first issue of the *Bulletin officiel du CLCF*:

— The creation of an interprofessional Film Board

— The institution of a mandatory professional card, to be delivered by the different trade unions commissions according to the qualifications and the integrity of the applicants. Non-political offences, bankruptcies and offences against France will be taken into account.

— The abolition of authors', technicians' and artists' exclusive rights in order to protect French cinema from the dominance of the trusts.

— An immediate reform of the status of intellectual ownership (director's proprietorial rights) and the revision of the *droit d'auteur* rates (royalties rates).

— The creation of an R' and D' film laboratory, a public office for film patents, and a veritable film school.

— The founding of a national cinémathèque.

— The setting up of cartoon and comedy film office.

— The broadcasting of film in rural areas in 16 mm format, the study and the shooting of film aimed at a rapprochement between urban and rural populations.

— The redistribution of investment profits into film production, cinemas, tax relief for cinemas showing State of the Art films, and profit-sharing schemes for the technicians and the artists.

— The creation of a propaganda office for French cinema.

— The appointment of film professionals to the censorship board.

— The creation of a production cooperative',

Bulletin officiel du CLCF, n° 1, 23 October 1944, in Bertin-Maghit, pp. 244 and 330.

⁵⁴ Léglise, p. 124. See also 'Le cinéma aux États Généraux de la Renaissance française', *La Cinématographie française*, 28 August 1945, p. 2.

⁵⁵ *L'Humanité*, n° 56, 20 October 1944.

Painlevé for the post of Director of the Film Board in replacement of Galey. The appointment raised the issue of the balance of power between Christian-Democrats and Communists. De Gaulle's reluctant approval cost the Communist Jean Guignebert his job as Minister of Information.⁵⁶ Riedinger was appointed as Painlevé's deputy on 14 October 1944. Four days later Philippe Acoulon became the new head of the COIC. Both nominations were approved and signed by the Minister of Information, Pierre-Henri Teitgen, who had himself replaced Jean Guignebert in the conditions described above. Besides their common involvement in the Resistance group 'Opera', both appointees had formerly worked as civil servants for the Vichy regime and were therefore likely to be called to appear in front of a purges commission. There can be little doubt that their appointment to posts of responsibility was received as a provocation by the CLCF. First and foremost, it wanted to do away with the COIC, yet by January 1945, it became obvious that the latter would not be abolished in the near future, prompting this comment from the CLCF: 'We are doing our utmost to start the industry up again and the government does nothing but get in the way. The film industry does not seem to be very high up on the government's agenda.' Painlevé, who was replaced by MRP-member Michel Fourré-Cormeray as early as 16 May 1945, felt disenchanted when reflecting on the limits of his powers. Justifying the fears expressed by *L'Humanité*, he explicitly accused Reidinger, and, by extension, the government:

I was totally ineffective. Everything was done to leave me totally powerless. They blocked me by firstly accepting the decree I would put forward then Riedinger would arrange for it not to be implemented. He did everything to encourage the cinema-owners's revolt. He never passed either the complaints or the sanctions which we'd decided on. In fact, the government wanted the situation to worsen so that they could get rid of me.⁵⁷

Less than a year after the Paris insurrection, Painlevé actually refused any official position offered to him following his replacement.

As far as film is concerned, the general perception seems to have been that the PCF was targeting the film industry. For Richebé, 'the Communist Party wanted total control over the

⁵⁶ Léglise, p. 245.

⁵⁷ Dixit Jean Painlevé, in Bertin-Maghit, p. 252.

film industry. After all it had a right to such control. It even went so far as to prove this by arranging for Jean Painlevé to be appointed director-general of the Film Board.'⁵⁸ This opinion was scarcely surprising for someone who had collaborated with the Vichy regime. His opinion was nevertheless shared by others who were not so compromised with the previous regime. The revolutionary, anti-capitalist mood of the era did not appeal to all within the film trade. As soon as October 1944, producers dissented from the CLCF, deserting the purges commissions. For them too the Communist inclination of Painlevé and the CLCF was a pill too hard to swallow. It comes as no surprise that the film employers did not relish the prospect of a nationalised industry or of a Communist-ruled film trade and 'desired, contrary to the CLCF, to separate the State from the film organisations as much as possible'.⁵⁹

Both the CLCF and Jean Painlevé were ostracised because of their links with the PCF. The CLCF and the *milices patriotiques* could be said to have been regarded by the Gaullists in the same way: both had been useful when necessary but now that there were legally-formed bodies in place, there was no reason for their continuation. In the second issue of *Le Film français*, Jean-Bernard-Derosnes, questioning the role of the CLCF, used a revealing metaphor: 'Jean Painlevé, the candidate of the CLCF, an honest man of integrity has been entrusted with the management of the Film Board. The Committee *must lay down its arms*' (my emphasis).⁶⁰ This was followed by an open letter to Louis Daquin who himself replied in the following issue and justified the continuation of the CLCF.⁶¹ For him the committee remained in place in order to back up and expand the film unions' demands.⁶² Through the CLCF the French Communist Party was deeply engaged in the reorganisation of the film industry in France. Since its views naturally coincided with those of the CLCF, as the numerous mentions of the Committee's activities and plans published in *L'Humanité* attest,

⁵⁸ Richebé, p. 174.

⁵⁹ Bertin-Maghit, p. 242.

⁶⁰ Jean-Bernard Derosnes, 'Parlons du CLC', *Le Film français*, n° 2, 15 December 1944, p. 3.

⁶¹ Derosnes, 'Lettre ouverte à Louis Daquin', *Le Film français*, n° 4, 29 December 1944, p. 3.

⁶² Louis Daquin, 'Reparlons du CLC', *Le Film français*, n° 5, 5 January 1945, p. 3.

it did not need to produce its own propositions as such or intervene in the debate as a political party expressing its own ideas.⁶³

The CLCF and, consequently the PCF did not manage to get control of the film industry. The purges were relatively unsuccessful, they lost the monopoly on film news reels, and if the State took over as tutor of the industry, it was a state in which the PCF had very limited power.⁶⁴ Whereas in 1944, the PCF had serious hopes of controlling the film industry, by 1946 these had vanished, and from then on to the present day the PCF's views on film would be expressed from an oppositional perspective. The Blum-Byrnes agreements would soon present the PCF with the opportunity for taking on its role as *the* champion of the French film industry.

⁶³ 'The special delegation of Joinville-Le-Pont met with representatives from the CLCF, led by M. Louis Daquin. The delegation promised them to do whatever it could to overcome any difficulties preventing a rapid recovery of French film production', *L'Humanité*, n° 68, 3 November 1944; 'As a number of foreign officials invited to the fortnight of French cinema, organised of the CLCF, the Cinémathèque, and the IDHEC under the patronage of the Minister for Information and the *Directeur général de la cinématographie*, are unable to be in Paris on the date planned, the fortnight is being postponed to a later date', *ibid.*, n° 77, 14 November 1944; 'On its agenda of 24 November 1944, the CLCF called for the early creation of an interprofessional film board to replace the COIC, set up by Vichy, which it regards as detrimental to the interests of French cinema', *ibid.*, n° 104, 15 December 1944; 'Meeting of the CLCF at the Mutualité. The CLCF calls for the dissolution of the COIC, the foundation of a professional board, composed of representatives of the different sectors of the industry, the foundation of a ministerial purge committee and the foundation of a film commission', *ibid.*, n° 116, 29 December 1944.

⁶⁴ Lindeperg, p. 60.

1.1.4. The PCF and the Blum-Byrnes Agreements: In Government

The Blum-Byrnes agreements signed in Spring 1946 constitute a landmark in the history of French cinema. The film historians Susan Hayward, René Prédal and Pierre Billard have all devoted several pages to the Franco-American trade agreements and the film clause that was attached to it.⁶⁵ Yet, after fifty years there is still no consensus as to the consequences of these agreements on the French film industry. Before examining the current views on the role of the Blum-Byrnes agreements, also known as the Washington agreements, on the post-war French film industry it is necessary to look at the events themselves and more thoroughly at the role played by the PCF in the campaign against the agreements. This cannot be done without first describing the situation of the Party and the positions it defended at the time.

After the capitulation of Germany on 8 May 1945 and in the aftermath of the 10th Congress of the PCF, which took place in Paris between 16 June and 1 July 1945, Maurice Thorez committed the PCF to the '*Bataille de la Production*'. In a famous speech delivered on 22 July 1945 in Waziers in front of Nord and Pas-de-Calais mine workers Thorez appealed for their understanding and their participation in the campaign, calling the workers to produce more, to make sacrifices in order to better the country's economy:

Today the production of coal is the most elevated duty of your class... you are producing to preserve and to reinforce the union between the working class, middle class workers, and the agricultural labouring classes, to insure the swift recovery of the country and to allow the moral and cultural renaissance of France.⁶⁶

This policy seems to have met with the approval of French people if one is to judge by the Party's successive electoral successes. On 21 October 1945, the Communists were not followed by the electorate when the latter put a limit on the power of the new consultative Assembly in the referendum on the new Assembly. They nevertheless emerged from the general elections as the main political force with 151 deputies and over 5 000 000 votes,

⁶⁵ Susan Hayward. *French National Cinema* (London: Routledge, 1993), pp. 26-28; René Prédal. *Le Cinéma français depuis 1945* (Paris: Nathan, 1991), pp. 34-36; Billard, pp. 512-519.

⁶⁶ Maurice Thorez, 'Produire, faire du charbon' (discours de Waziers, 21 July 1945), *Œuvres choisies, vol. 2, 1938-1950* (Paris: Éditions Sociales, 1966), pp. 371-411.

having also fared quite well in the local elections a month earlier. With the 133 socialist deputies, a Socialist-Communist coalition could claim an overall majority and aim at putting into practice the programme of the CNR.⁶⁷ This solution was turned down by the Socialists. On 21 November 1945 the PCF, the SFIO and the MRP formed a government under de Gaulle's leadership. Five ministers out of twenty belonged to the PCF.⁶⁸ This arrangement did not agree with General de Gaulle, who resigned from office on 20 January 1946, opening the way for the '*tripartisme*', the three-party coalition (MRP, SFIO, PCF). On 5 May 1946, the French electorate rejected once again a proposed constitution that would have given enormous power to the National Assembly. The following month, in the next general election, the PCF was briefly outstaged as France's main political force by the MRP — 146 deputies vs 160, 25.7% vs 28.1% of valid votes.⁶⁹ The next general election (the third in just over a year!) saw the return of the PCF as the biggest French political party with just under 5 500 000 votes (28.6%) and 183 deputies. Yet, due to the collapse of the SFIO — 90 deputies — Socialists and Communists were a minority.⁷⁰

With popular backing and Ministers sitting in successive governments, the PCF was able to influence the decision-making process. Still today, Party members look back on those years with some pride. The nationalisation of the mining sector, the bank sector, the gas and electricity companies and the insurance sector all took place between December 1944 and April 1946 as the result of Communist insistence in the face of de Gaulle's reluctance to follow the path of nationalization. Ambroise Croizat set up the social security system, and Maurice Thorez prepared a new status for the betterment of public service and the improvement of civil servants' conditions.⁷¹

In the speech he delivered after his nomination as head of government on 15 February 1946, Félix Gouin pointed out the catastrophic situation of the French economy. Among the

⁶⁷ PCF, *Histoire du Parti communiste français [manuel]* (Paris: Éditions Sociales, 1964), p. 474.

⁶⁸ 'Thorez as senior minister in charge of the Civil Service, Charles Tillon as Minister for Armaments, François Billoux as Minister for the National Economy, Marcel Paul as Minister for Industrial Production, Ambroise Croizat as Labour Minister.', Robrieux, vol 4, p. 703.

⁶⁹ Ibid., p. 703.

⁷⁰ Ibid., p. 704.

⁷¹ *Histoire du Parti communiste français*, pp. 479-484.

possible solutions, that of American aid was approved. On 15 March 1946 a delegation led by the Socialist Léon Blum started negotiating with an American delegation headed by Secretary of State James Byrnes. France was hoping for a loan of several billion dollars but would actually only be granted about 650 million. Alongside this discussion, James Byrnes and Léon Blum signed an agreement — an ‘*arrangement*’ in the French copy, an ‘understanding’ in the American copy — on commercial film exchange between the two countries.⁷² This would replace the existing quota system with a screen quota system.⁷³ According to the new system, from 1 July 1946 there would no longer be any restriction for the importation of American films in France. The other important provision was that for four weeks in each quarter (16 weeks per year), French exhibitors could only show French films. For the other 36 weeks they could show any films they wished, American or otherwise.⁷⁴

With the battle for production launched, a comfortable degree of electoral support, and Ministers proving their sense of responsibilities and their statemanship, the Blum-Byrnes agreements signed in Washington on 28 May 1946 were quietly announced in the 29 May 1946 issue of *L’Humanité* in a rather impressive self-congratulatory tone:

The Franco-American financial agreement was signed yesterday. It follows up on the ‘Monnet plan’ for the rebuilding of our economy, a plan which was drawn up in agreement with the CGT. It was signed on 28 May 1946 at 8.23 p.m. by Mr Byrnes and Léon Blum.

In the discussion with the United States, France’s desire to ensure its economic recovery, the effort made by our miners, our workers and our technicians, encouraged by Maurice Thorez’s appeals, have undoubtedly been determining factors in the successful outcome of this agreement.⁷⁵

After presenting Felix Gouin’s satisfaction at the conclusion of the negotiations: ‘The conclusion of this Franco-American financial agreement, which will be of certain benefit to the economic recovery of our country — at least in the short term, is a cause for celebration for all French people.’ *L’Humanité* complained that the agreements did not go far enough

⁷² Billard, p. 513.

⁷³ Hayward, p. 26.

⁷⁴ For the complete text, see ‘L’arrangement entre le Gouvernement provisoire de la République Française et le Gouvernement des États-Unis au sujet de la projection des films américains en France’, *Le Film français*, n° 79, 7 June 1946, p. 1.

⁷⁵ *L’Humanité*, n° 559, 29 May 1946.

and underlined once more ‘the role played by the miners, the metal workers and the Communist Party and his general secretary, Maurice Thorez... in the recovery of our economy’.⁷⁶ Then the Communist daily stressed the role of Auguste Lecœur, one of the Communist Ministers, in the successful outcome of the negotiations: ‘During his trip to Washington, as Minister for Coal and qualified representative of the heroic and courageous French working class, [Auguste Lecœur] brought precious help to the Blum-Monnet mission and basing himself on fact was able to provide irrefutable arguments to our American friends.’ (sic)⁷⁷

The next day, the newspaper published a more thorough review of the Washington agreements ending by a short reference to the clause on film: ‘finally, a separate agreement cancelled some of the restrictions imposed on the distribution of American films on the French market’.⁷⁸ It is only in the issue of 31 May 1946 that the mention of possible negative repercussions of the agreements on French cinema appeared: ‘Undoubtedly, the agreement will have serious repercussions on our artistic production.’⁷⁹ The Communist daily underlined the fact that the agreements fell short of the profession’s claim of a quota of seven weeks out of thirteen and, quoting *Le Monde*, alerted its readers to the consequences on French film production.

Ten days later, the PCF launched the campaign against the Blum-Byrnes agreements. First it allowed those within the film trade who showed deep concern at those agreements to use the columns of *L’Humanité* as a tribune. First of a long series prophesying doom — one of the headlines of the paper read: ‘the Franco-American agreements deal a death blow to French cinema’ —, followed by an extensive report on Jean-Paul Frogerais’s press conference where the latter exposed the risks incurred by French cinema in view of the new agreements. According to the president of the producers’ union, French cinema will suffer economically — unemployment in the trade is bound to go up thanks to a deficit in terms of film production —, and culturally — quality will go down because of the poor quality of many an

⁷⁶ Ibid.

⁷⁷ Ibid.

⁷⁸ *L’Humanité*, n° 560, 30 May 1946.

⁷⁹ *L’Humanité*, n° 561, 31 May 1946.

American film about to be shown in France. Worth noticing as well is Mr Frogerais's mention of possible compensations for French cinema which could take the form of State subsidies and removal of tax.⁸⁰ The following week *L'Humanité* extensively covered the meeting of 14 June 1946. The different branches of the film industry had decided to meet and voice their concern, if not anger, at the Washington agreements. Fernand Grenier intervened in the debate in the name of the PCF assuring the professionals of the Party's support in their call for a review of the agreements.⁸¹ For the next fifteen years, Fernand Grenier would be the PCF's spokesman on film matters. First elected as deputy for Saint-Denis in 1937, he would be re-elected regularly until 1968. He had been a member of de Gaulle's cabinet in Algiers with responsibility for the Air Force.⁸² At the time of the Blum-Byrnes agreements, Fernand Grenier was in charge of a working party in the media commission (*Presse-Radio-Cinéma*) of the National Assembly.⁸³ The Party had therefore chosen an experienced member to handle the tricky issue of French cinema.

The way the PCF swiftly expressed its solidarity with the film trade comes as no surprise, given the bond between the two that was established in the Resistance and after the war. Yet a few questions arise. The PCF, which was part of the government could not have ignored the signs of concern and the industry's warnings that had started to appear in the trade press as early as October 1945.

As for the relationship between American and French cinema, after the war there was a period of naïve optimism which can be explained by the mood of the period and five years of frustration. This optimism can be found in the reports of Pierre Blanchar's visit to the United

⁸⁰ *L'Humanité*, n° 568, 8 June 1946.

⁸¹ 'Le cinéma français ne veut pas mourir. Révision des accords Blum-Byrnes', *L'Humanité*, n° 576, 16-17 June 1946.

⁸² In a letter dated 9 September 1944, Charles de Gaulle thanked Fernand Grenier for his services, in Charles de Gaulle. *Lettres, notes et carnets, juin 1943-mai 1945* (Paris: Plon, 1983), p. 310.

⁸³ 'Les communistes dans les différentes commissions de l'Assemblée. 14e commission de la Presse, de la Radio et du Cinéma : Fernand Grenier, Seine; René Thuillier, Aisne; Madeleine Braun, Seine; Hubert Ruffe, Lot et Garonne; Auguste Tourtaud, Creuse; Henri Vedrines, Allier; Marie-Claude Vaillant-Couturier, Seine; Lucien Dutard, Dordogne; Delval, M.U.R.; Charles Lahousse, Gironde; Général Tubert, M.U.R.; Alphonse Bouloux, Vienne', *France Nouvelle*, n° 7, 8 January 1946, p. 2. 'Presse-Radio-Cinéma, Responsable du groupe de travail: Fernand Grenier; Adjoint: René Thuillier. Membres: Madeleine Braun, Robert Chambeiron, Gilbert de Chambrun, Gabriel Citine, Lucien Dutard, Pierre Fayet, Auguste Tourtaud, Henri Vedrines, d'Astier de la Vigerie', *ibid.*, n° 33, 6 July 1946.

Sates in the winter of 1944-45, either while he was still abroad: 'News from Pierre Blanchar on his third month in the States. The president of the CLCF initiated negotiations in America aimed at organising the distribution of the film of the liberation of Paris in all the major cinemas across America.'⁸⁴ During his stay in America Pierre Blanchar opened the channels of communication between American and French producers thus laying the foundations of a permanent relationship between the two countries, or on his return: 'Reception on 23 March 1945 to celebrate Pierre Blanchar's return from the United States.' He talked about his trip and about America's friendship for France. He presented the *Film de la libération de Paris, Pontcarral, Goupi Mains-Rouges*. Listening to him, one had the impression that one could both hear and see the great nations of the English-speaking world celebrating and admiring examples of French cinema at its best', or in Jean-Pierre Aumont's comment on the likelihood of a market for French films in the United States: 'Believe me, the right conditions already exist in the United States to foster the advancement and appreciation of our culture and our way of thinking after the war.'⁸⁵ It should also be added that in addition to reports on Franco-American negotiations, a number of articles on the situation of the British film industry were published between 1945 and 1946. Parallels were drawn between the two countries in the way they dealt with the American issue.⁸⁶

Soon there were more sombre echoes of the difficulties the two countries were facing in terms of the importation of American films in post-war Europe. The 27 October 1945 issue of *La Cinématographie française* shows that the French proposal was that 55% of the screens would be reserved for French films and 45% for foreign films. This scheme was refused by the Americans. The magazine remarks that following the stalling of the

⁸⁴ 'Des nouvelles de Pierre Blanchar', *La Cinématographie française*, 6 February 1945, p. 3.

⁸⁵ 'Pierre Blanchar, retour d'Hollywood', *La Cinématographie française*, 28 March 1945, p. 4; Jean-Pierre Aumont, 'Le film français en Amérique', *Le Film français*, n° 9, 2 February 1945, p. 27.

⁸⁶ Ralph Bond. 'Quel est l'avenir du cinéma britannique', *ibid.*, n° 9, 2 February 1945, p. 5; 'Débat sur le cinéma à la Chambre des Communes', *ibid.*, n° 18, 6 April 1945, p. 10; 'The House of Commons has approved a measure increasing the number of films distributed in Britain. The number of mandatory films will increase from 20 per cent to 22 per cent in 1946 and from 22 % to 25 per cent in 1947. The proportion of British films screened will go from 15 per cent to 17.5 per cent in 1946 and to 20 per cent in 1947. These debates revealed the considerable increase in the importation of American film to Britain: 29 million dollars in 1937, 87 million dollars in 1943', 'Le film britannique se défend', *La Cinématographie française*, 19 April 1945, p. 2; 'En Angleterre, important débat sur le cinéma à la Chambre des Communes. Le gouvernement prêt à aider les producteurs de films britanniques', *ibid.*, n° 1132, 24 November 1945, pp. 3-4.

negotiations between M. Fourré-Cormeray, the *Directeur général de la cinématographie*, and Harold Smith, special delegate of the MPPDA. (Motion Picture Producers and Distributors of America) discussions would now take place at governmental level.⁸⁷

Gaston Defferre, the Minister for Information in charge of the file, Billard explains, was not surprised that his interlocutors should bring the question of American films into the discussion between Blum and Byrnes.⁸⁸ Once again naivety seems to have prevailed, since he thought that the Americans would accept a screen quota of 8 French films and 5 foreign films every 13 weeks as was advocated by the French film trade.⁸⁹ Wasn't he aware that the successor to Williams Hayes as chairman of the MPPDA, Eric Johnston, had already shown his colours as early as October 1945, when he declared that he did not expect any commercial barriers to be raised against American films as the USA had never raised barriers against foreign films themselves.⁹⁰

There had been plenty of evidence around to suggest that the USA would stick to their guns in terms of film quotas in France. Why then the belated Communist reaction to the film clause of the Blum-Byrnes agreements? This question may be answered in two ways. The PCF was neither involved in nor kept informed of this part of the Washington discussions. This explanation seems plausible when one considers firstly that neither *L'Écran français* nor *Les Lettres françaises* devoted much space to the agreements before they were actually signed, although the links between the PCF and film unions or ex-members of the defunct CLCF would lead one to imagine that someone knew about their likely outcome.⁹¹ The relationship between the three government parties was not such that they would readily

⁸⁷ 'Les tractation franco-américaines au point mort déclare New York', *La Cinématographie française*, n° 1128, 27 October 1945, p. 3. See 'Les producteurs et les distributeurs s'inquiètent de la situation actuelle du film français, *ibid.*, n° 1129, 3 November 1945, p. 3 and 'Où en est la discussion franco-américaine?', *Le Film français*, n° 65, 1 March 1946, p. 1.

⁸⁸ Billard, p. 514.

⁸⁹ V. Roger, *La Cinématographie française*, 28 August 1945, p. 1.

⁹⁰ 'M. Eric Johnston qui a succédé à M. Williams Hays à la tête de la MPPDA s'occupera activement de l'exportation des films américains sur les marchés étrangers', *La Cinématographie française*, n° 1128, 27 October 1945, p. 6. On the foreign policy of the American film industry, see Thomas H. Gubback, *The International Film Industry* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1969), pp. 91-141.

⁹¹ See for instance, 'Quatre sur treize', *L'Écran français*, n° 49, 5 June 1946, p. 4; 'A-t-on signé, à Washington, l'arrêt de mort du cinéma français?...', *ibid.*, n° 51, 19 June 1946, pp. 6-7; *Les Lettres françaises*, n° 106, 3 May 1946; *ibid.*, n° 111, 7 June 1946; n° 112, 14 June 1946; *ibid.*, n° 113, 21 June 1946; *ibid.*, n° 118, 26 July 1946.

confide in one another. The second answer would imply that for the PCF too, the film industry took second place behind the French economy as a whole. In the French film world, the following statement by Léon Blum is often quoted as one of the most infamous ever issued from a French government:

I must admit that, if in the higher interests of France, I had had to sacrifice the film industry, I would have done so without a qualm, even if at a later stage legitimate compensation had been found.[...] We should not forget that France is to a certain extent indebted to the USA. [...] The recent agreements are proof of their friendly disposition towards us given that they agreed that 30% of our national exploitation be reserved to our own films, whereas Italy only obtained 17% and Great-Britain 22%.’⁹²

The PCF itself would often refer to it as an example of French government’s readiness to let the film trade down. Although the film clause was not subject to ratification by the Parliament, its discussion at the *Assemblée nationale* represented nevertheless the most important debate to date dedicated to cinema and allowed Fernand Grenier to portray the difficult situation of French cinema. Drawing attention to the first effects of the agreement on film exploitation and their likely further consequences, and reminding the Assembly of his former intervention, he called on the government and the Minister of Information to show more concern for the future of French cinema. Claiming that there were already too many young people in France who knew more about Gary Cooper than about Guynemer, he appealed for the rescue of French cinema, before finishing his speech by reminding his audience that the Communist parliamentary group were one hundred per cent behind the claims of the film trade and would not spare any effort to see them satisfied. ‘It is a matter of life and death concerning an art-form born in France and which we want to save.’⁹³ Jacques Duclos, who had himself also raised the question of the film clause at the commission, had this to say before the vote: ‘We want the country to recover as quickly as possible. We rely on the Washington agreements and on our allies to help us obtain the largest share of German coal. Given the reality of the situation, the Communist parliamentary group will vote in

⁹² ‘Le quota. M. Léon Blum explique les accords franco-américains’, *La Cinématographie française*, n° 1163, 29 June 1946, pp. 5-6.

⁹³ *L’Humanité*, n° 617, 2 August 1946; ‘Le cinéma français devant l’Assemblée constituante’, *Le Film français*, n° 89, 23 August 1946, pp. 14-15.

favour of the ratification of the agreements, albeit unenthusiastically.⁹⁴ On 8 August 1946, the Blum-Byrnes agreements were unanimously ratified by the 550 deputies, including the Communists. For the PCF too, the overall economic recovery took precedence over the welfare of the French film industry, '*Bataille de la production oblige*'.

Fernand Grenier, Jacques Duclos, Auguste Tourtaud, had each expressed the PCF's concern about the future of cinema in France.⁹⁵ Yet, by the end of August 1946, the question had almost completely vanished from the columns of the Communist press. This disappearance was not final, and the PCF would denounce the notorious film clause again, but this time the political context would be entirely different with the campaign taking quite a new turn, as will be presently discussed.

⁹⁴ *L'Humanité*, n° 611, 26 July 1946; *ibid.*, n° 617, 2 August 1946.

⁹⁵ *L'Humanité*, n° 615, 31 July 1946.

1.2. The Cold War

The *tripartisme* between the PCF, the SFIO and the MRP was never a cosy arrangement. Both internationally and nationally the tension among the three parties steadily increased almost as soon as the coalition was set up. According to the PCF, 'at every level, divisions are deepening. The tactics of the bourgeoisie are to bring the PCF either to the point of breaking-up with the other parties or to accept a policy which would run contrary to the interests of the working class, democracy and peace'.⁹⁶ The PCF was finding it increasingly difficult to accept the criticisms of the USSR's foreign policy in Europe by the Americans. Indeed, between 10 March and 25 April 1947 in Moscow, during an international conference on Germany which brought together the four Ministers of Foreign Affairs (USA, USSR, United Kingdom, France) the French voted against the Soviet proposals while at the same time signing a separate agreement with the USA and Great Britain on the shipping of German coal to France.⁹⁷ As for home affairs, the situation was equally strained. The Vietnam conflict and the Madagascar insurrection proved hard pills to swallow and made the position of the Communist Ministers in government untenable. Although the Party's deputies abstained, the five Communist Ministers voted for war funds for Indochina. To make things worse, the extreme-left nationalist uprising in Madagascar was violently suppressed. Yet it is on social matters that the crisis point was reached. On 4 May 1947, following huge May 1st demonstrations in Paris and all over France, the PCF broke solidarity and voted against the government in a vote of confidence on economic policies such as the issue of wage increase and price cuts.⁹⁸ To Thorez's astonishment, Paul Ramadier, the *Président du Conseil*, sacked the Communist Ministers on the spot. This marked the first phase of the break between the parties. For the PCF's leadership this was only a momentary hitch. In the days following the sacking both Jacques Duclos and Maurice Thorez declared that they were willing to assist the government and that they would be back in office. During the 11th

⁹⁶ *Histoire du Parti communiste français*, p. 499.

⁹⁷ *Ibid.*

⁹⁸ Robrieux, vol. 2, p. 194.

Congress of the French Communist Party, which took place in Strasbourg from 25 to 29 June 1947, the criticism would become more severe and would adopt a strong anti-American stance. The USA were accused of expansionism and imperialism. According to the Party's general secretary the Marshall plan constituted the means through which American trusts would have full licence to invade Europe and the rest of the world. Yet, in his address to the delegates, Thorez still called for unity with the Socialists in spite of their numerous errors of judgement.⁹⁹ By the beginning of the Summer 1947, Philippe Robrieux explains, the French card-carriers were 'still profoundly convinced of their party's strength and power', and remained optimistic as to its coming back to power.¹⁰⁰ This was not to be for the next 34 years.

What was at stake originated outside the borders of France and left little room for manoeuvres for the PCF and its leadership. Answering a summons sent by the Soviet Communist Party, the European fellow parties attended a conference in Slarska-Poreba in Poland (22-27 September), during which the parties' policy for many years to come would be decided. On the first day, Zhdanov drew up the programme: after WWII, faced with the increasing authority of the USSR on the international scene, the USA had embarked on a policy of expansionism and imperialism with the aim of installing pro-American governments in satellite countries and then handing them over to the American trusts.¹⁰¹ These governments were manned by fascists (Spain), Christian-Democrats (Italy), Labour (Great Britain) or Socialists (France), all sharing, Zhdanov underlined, the same contempt for socialism, democracy and peace. The struggle for socialism therefore could only take place at an international level; national considerations must come second. Global resistance to the USA under the leadership of Stalin and the USSR became the *raison d'être* of any Communist party. The Western European parties in particular were given the task of resisting the enemy where it was most dangerous, in other words, on its own ground. For the PCF

⁹⁹ In his speech, Maurice Thorez pointed in particular to Léon Blum: 'his attempt to idealise the expansionist policy of American trusts can only weaken the French working class and the French people as a whole, both ideologically and politically', *L'Humanité*, n° 870, 26 June 1947.

¹⁰⁰ Robrieux, vol. 2, pp. 219-220.

¹⁰¹ The text of Zhdanov's report was reproduced in full in *France Nouvelle*, n° 97, 25 October 1947, pp 9-11.

this meant a change of policy. No more lukewarm support of the Marshall plan, no more assisting the government, but a blanket condemnation of the policies advocated by Socialists such as Léon Blum and Guy Mollet. The PCF had to criticise itself and acknowledge in front of the delegates that the policy it had followed after the war had not only failed but had moreover been a serious political misjudgement. The Polish conference resulted in the creation of the Cominform, a committee which would co-ordinate and control the activities of several European Communist parties. Indeed the Cominform constituted the Communist headquarters of the Cold War.

The PCF was prompt in adopting the new line: the second phase of the rupture was beginning with lasting consequences, namely the isolation of the PCF on the French political scene. As soon as the conference was over, *L'Humanité* announced that from now on its role was 'to defend the national honour, the independence and the sovereignty of their country against the imperialist plans of expansionism and aggression. This is the essential duty of all Communist parties' and pointed a finger at the enemy: 'It is the Socialist party and Leon Blum himself who have headed the campaign to give France over to American imperialists.'¹⁰² Such strong headlines translated the Party's new attitude towards the Socialists and would soon become everyday routine, so much so that it would be extremely tiring to list them all.¹⁰³ Sometimes the Socialists were singled out as seen above; sometimes they would be incorporated in the so-called 'American party': 'France's political and economic independence is under threat. The "American party", from Blum to de Gaulle, is facilitating the USA's expansionist campaign'. The PCF also personalised its attacks against the 'American party' and when this happened, the Socialists leaders were invariably the main targets with above all Léon Blum playing the part of the principal scapegoat: 'Leon Blum is the key figure of the "American party"'. He does his best to undermine any notion of national

¹⁰² *L'Humanité*, n° 956, 5-6 October 1947.

¹⁰³ Here are a few examples: 'The aim of Blum's, Ramadier's, Reynaud's, Teitgen's and de Gaulle's American party is to crush the working class, destroy democracy and force the people to be under the yoke of the Mighty Dollar', *France Nouvelle*, n° 101, 22 November 1947, p. 1; 'The "troisième force" of Blum, Mollet, Pivert and Moch is nothing other than the servant of fascist reaction. It is an instrument of American imperialism and the principal enemy of democracy, independence and peace', *France Nouvelle*, n° 105, 20 December 1947, p. 1; 'The government of the American party', *ibid.*, n° 106, 27 December 1947, p. 1.

sovereignty, the main obstacle to imperialism. He wants to use the UN as a weapon in the hands of the mighty Dollar.’¹⁰⁴ For the PCF, Léon Blum was not only guilty of his political behaviour at the time: in a manner typical of Stalinist methods where history may be re-written to suit one’s needs,¹⁰⁵ he had to be shown as someone who had never been a reliable ally and whose political route had always been less than honest and trustworthy:

1. The deep-seated causes of Léon Blum’s betrayal.
 1. Leon Blum and the workers’ movement.
 2. Léon Blum’s capitulations before the war
 3. Léon Blum and the Occupation.
 4. Léon Blum’s two objectives since the Liberation.
 - A. Dividing the working class.
 - B. Delivering France into the hands of American imperialism.
2. The Blum-Byrnes agreements.

In March 1946, he went to Washington for the signing of the first Franco-American agreements. This was the first evidence France’s subservience to the American dollar and brought about the demise the French film industry. The American magazine *Life* saluted him as the champion of French reintegration within the Western world.¹⁰⁶

It was not the first time the Blum-Byrnes agreements played a role in the vilification of Léon Blum’s character. Indeed, as I shall now demonstrate, the Washington agreements ranked very high on the list of Blum’s misdeeds that was drawn up and constantly updated by the PCF.

1.2.1. The PCF and the Blum-Byrnes Agreements: Out of Government.

In 1947, the controversy about the agreements or, more specifically, around the film clause that was added to them re-emerged with a vengeance in the Communist press. It would do so in two stages, first in the aftermath of the Party’s Congress in Strasbourg, secondly from October 1947 onwards (in the aftermath of the Slarska-Poreba conference).

¹⁰⁴ Robert Bouvier, ‘Léon Blum, protagoniste du parti américain’, *France Nouvelle*, n° 100, 15 November 1947, p. 3.

¹⁰⁵ André Bazin gives a perfect depiction of this feature, typical of Stalinist methods, in his article on Stalin and Russian cinema, ‘Le cinéma soviétique et le mythe de Staline’, *Esprit*, August 1950, pp. 210-235.

¹⁰⁶ Robert Bouvier, ‘Les racines profondes de la trahison de Léon Blum’, *France Nouvelle*, n° 110, 24 January 1948, pp. 4-5.

In May 1947, Georges Sadoul put in place the tindersticks of the stake on which the Blum-Byrnes agreements would later be set ablaze. He portrayed Eric Johnson, ‘the Czar of American cinema’ as ‘an envoy of the Rockefeller and Morgan groups who had come to Europe to tear down the Iron Curtain set up by Russian leaders and French opponents — principally the PCF — to the Blum-Byrnes agreements.’¹⁰⁷ A week later, while singing the praise of American cinema — ‘we like and admire American cinema, which fathered together, with French and Russian cinema, film as an art-form’ — and of several American directors — expressing admiration for the films of John Ford, Orson Welles, Frank Capra, William Wyler, Milestone, Charlie Chaplin ‘whose works bear witness to their attachment to freedom and democracy in the sense Lincoln and Roosevelt gave to those words’ — Sadoul accused Johnson, whom he compared to Goebbels, of representing the worst side of American cinema: ‘Mr Johnson embodies only one side of Hollywood, the baser aspect of business and politics.’¹⁰⁸

In a series of articles published in *L’Humanité* in July 1947 under the title ‘*Cinéma français S.O.S.!*’ Guy Leclerc denounced the Washington agreement and called for its revision. In the first of his papers he attacked Eric Johnston, ‘the great dictator of American cinema’, then criticised Gaston Defferre who had declared a year before that ‘the agreements would enable France to rebuild its film industry’ and evoked the imbalance between American and French films. In the second one, he stressed the unfairness of the transatlantic competition, underlining the fact that French films have little access to the American market, and called for the revision of the agreement.¹⁰⁹ In the third, he recommended the measures advocated by the unions, such as production and exportation subsidies or the modernisation of the film theatres. Finally, in the last one he proposed the nationalisation of several studios. More significantly he called for a ‘real film policy’. ‘What is at stake is our prestige, our culture and our national independence, on which depends our capacity to both produce films

¹⁰⁷ *L’Humanité*, n° 829, 9 May 1947.

¹⁰⁸ *L’Humanité*, n° 835, 16 May 1947.

¹⁰⁹ See for instance, ‘Dirigé par les trusts Rockefeller et Morgan, appuyé par le Vatican, soutenu par la réaction, le cinéma américain élimine le cinéma français’, *France Nouvelle*, n° 102, 29 November 1947, pp. 6-7 & 10.

and express ourselves', reminding his readers that there was a Ministry for Cinema in the USSR. The argument of national independence in face of economic and cultural American imperialism was already put forward in a tone which foreshadowed the vehemence of the years to come: 'and dozens of Rita Hayworths have covered Europe with their pervasive perfumes... and no less pervasive propaganda.'¹¹⁰

Both Sadoul's harsh criticism of American export policy and Leclerc's call for an independent national cinema overtly contained a denunciation of the Blum-Byrnes film clause. The campaign to review the latter would reach new heights the following autumn and winter.

The second stage of the crusade against the Blum-Byrnes agreement started soon after the creation of the Cominform. In the 24 October 1947 issue of *L'Humanité* a full page is devoted to portraying the evil effects the USA had on France. Written in the extremely vehement and often contemptuous tone which would characterise the PCF's prose for most of the following decade, this article exemplified the Party's new attitude after the Slarska-Poreba conference: America was the mother of all evils and the danger went beyond France's borders. The danger was global. According to the Communist daily, beyond American economic aid lurked a vast enterprise of propaganda: 'Truman's America installs at the very heart of our country its centres of propaganda, invades our publishing houses and our bookshops, makes our screens its own.'¹¹¹ Obviously film was one of the vectors of American propaganda. Backing its argument with Eric Johnston's own statement:

You must understand that American film is not only the best contact with, but also the best representative of America. Whereas British commerce is heralded by the flag. I believe American commerce is heralded by the film. If Clark Gable takes his shirt off, young men around the world will do the same; if Leonora Travers puts on a sweater, young girls around the world will too.¹¹²

¹¹⁰ Guy Leclerc, 'Cinéma français S.O.S. !' in *L'Humanité*, n° 891, 20-21 July 1947; *ibid.*, n° 893, 23 July 1947; *ibid.*, n° 895, 26 July 1947; *ibid.*, n° 901, 1 August 1947.

¹¹¹ 'L'Amérique dégrade l'esprit', *L'Humanité*, n° 972, 24 October 1947.

¹¹² *Ibid.*

Guy Leclerc went on to blame Léon Blum for the signing of the Washington agreements for which the Socialist politician would, from now on, bear sole responsibility.¹¹³

A week later, in an article published in *France Nouvelle* under the title ‘the consequences of the Blum-Byrnes agreements’, the attacks became more precise. Comparisons between the number of American films and the number of French films screened over the last months were made, showing for instance the imbalance between the number of certificates given to American and French films to the advantage of the former.¹¹⁴ Very telling also was the way economic consequences were linked to social and moral ones. The drastic effects of the agreements were, in addition to bringing unemployment and poverty to the film trade, the ‘disintegration of the French nation and were an attempt to corrupt and demoralise our young people with films of brain-numbing stupidity, where eroticism vies for first place with hollywoodism, and where the gangster is king. The aim of those films is not to prepare our youth to fulfil their duty towards France, towards the Republic but to turn them into an army of slaves crushed under the iron heel of America.’¹¹⁵ Such a vilification of America could not have taken place before the Polish meeting. The Stalinist dialectics of good and evil, right and wrong was now employed to its full capacity.

The offensive against the agreements having been rekindled at a political level, the campaign needed a fresh start within the film industry. On 26 October 1947 a general assembly of the film workers trade union chaired by the general secretary of the *Fédération du Spectacle*, Jacques Marion, declared that the USA used cinema as a scout for further overall seizure of France’s — and the rest of the world’s — industries and economies and called for a boycott of American films.¹¹⁶ Charles Chezeau, general secretary of the film branch of the *Fédération du Spectacle* voiced his concern in *L’Humanité* on 5 November

¹¹³ Ibid.

¹¹⁴ Thorez, ‘Les conséquences des accords Blum-Byrnes’, in ‘Pour la défense de la République et de l’indépendance nationale’, *France Nouvelle*, n° 98, 1 November 1947, pp. 6-11 (9). The article quotes Marcel Pagnol, who declared: ‘French cinema is in dire straits, it could soon be dead’. Marcel Pagnol’s quote had already appeared in *L’Humanité*, n° 823, 28 August 1947, and in his address to the Central Committee of 29 October 1947, Maurice Thorez also mentioned Marcel Pagnol’s statement while denouncing the ‘sad consequences of the Blum-Byrnes agreements’, *ibid.*, n° 977, 30 October 1947.

¹¹⁵ Thorez, ‘Les conséquences des accords Blum-Byrnes’, p. 9.

¹¹⁶ *L’Humanité*, n° 977, 30 October 1947.

1947, as did Louis Daquin on 9 November.¹¹⁷ On 15 November 1947, *L'Humanité* opened its columns to the Film Technicians Union, affiliated to the CGT. The union demanded, in addition to existing claims, new regulations for co-productions and film dubbing, called for a review of the Blum-Byrnes agreements and, above all, advocated the creation of a *Comité de Défense*.¹¹⁸ This became a reality on 19 December 1947. The *Comité de Défense du Cinéma Français* (CDCF) was set up during a meeting at the IDHEC premises. The members of the new CDCF came from almost every department of the film trade — directors (Marcel Carné, Jacques Becker, Jean Delannoy, Claude Autant-Lara, Marcel L'Herbier, Jean Grémillon), actors (Noël-Noël, André Luguet), technicians (Charles Chezeau), composers (Jean Wiener), writers (Pierre Laroche), film critics (René Farre), film societies (Georges Sadoul) and even a producer, albeit in a private capacity, (M. Kamenka). Also conspicuous were PCF's members and sympathizers — a town councillor (Voguet), the secretary of the *Union nationale des intellectuels*, of Communist obedience (Nicolas), Joinville's mayor (Robert Leloche) and of course Fernand Grenier — who brought the Party's support to the newly-created committee.¹¹⁹ The CDCF did not lose time in organising meetings in order to mobilise both the public and the profession.¹²⁰

The climax of the campaign against the agreements took place in January 1948. The CDCF organised a massive demonstration in Paris on 5 January 1948. Tens of thousands of people marched through Paris protesting against the American invasion of French screens and calling for a review of the existing arrangement. Among the crowd, composed mainly of professionals and spectators stood out numerous stars such as Jean Marais and famous directors such as Jacques Becker.¹²¹ The protest had been duly advertised in *L'Humanité* on the eve of the demonstration — 'United, we'll save French cinema' declared the actress

¹¹⁷ 'Le cinéma français ne veut pas mourir', *L'Humanité*, n° 982, 5 November 1947. 'Le cinéma français ne veut pas mourir', *L'Humanité*, n° 986, 9 November 1947.

¹¹⁸ *L'Humanité*, n° 991, 15 November 1947.

¹¹⁹ 'Le Comité de défense du cinéma français se constitue', *L'Humanité*, n° 1021, 20 December 1947.

¹²⁰ On 23 December 1947, for instance, Georges Sadoul gave a lecture on the 'agony of French cinema' in a public hall in the 3rd district of Paris, *L'Humanité*, n° 1023, 22 December 1947.

¹²¹ Jean Marais's presence in the demonstration gave rise to a brief argument with the actor Claude Dauphin, who had accused him of spoiling the Franco-American friendship in *L'Intransigent*, 'a Gaullist yankee leaflet', *L'Humanité*, n° 1036, 7 January 1948.

Madeleine Sologne on the front page — and was of course extensively reported the following Monday — ‘Keep French cinema alive proclaimed in their tens of thousands, stars, technicians and spectators demonstrating in the boulevards.’¹²² Jules Moch sent in the riot police to defend the Blum-Byrnes agreements.’¹²³ — with a photo of Jean Marais, Roger Pigault, Jacques Becker, Madeleine Sologne and Claude Maffei on the front page.

The demonstration may have been the highlight of the CDCF’s campaign, but it was not the end of it. The campaign went on for a number of months still claiming the backing of the PCF. In fact, the Party started very early to claim its role as the one and only true champion of French cinema, comforted in this belief by statement such as Madeleine Sologne’s: ‘It must be said that the PCF was the only party to fight for the defence of our film industry.’¹²⁴ This and the overall Party’s involvement in the offensive launched by the CDCF did not fail to stimulate debate at a professional as well as a political level.

France-Film Information, a monthly magazine ‘at the service of French cinema’ adopted a different approach. In its December 1947 issue, Charles Ford, its editor in chief, denied the PCF the honour of being the first political party to alert the government to the difficulties French cinema was confronting: ‘Following the example of Roger Duchet, an MRP Councillor of the Republic whose intervention attracted considerable attention a few months ago, Fernand Grenier, the Communist deputy who chairs the media commission has questioned the government on the current status of French cinema.’¹²⁵ There is a certain ingenuity and irony manifest in Charles Ford’s opinion as is confirmed by the very first line of his editorial: ‘French cinema does not want to die’. Such headlines, it has been shown above, had been commonplace in the Communist press going back nearly as far as the day of the signing of the Blum-Byrnes agreements.

¹²² *L’Humanité*, n° 1034, 4-5 January 1948.

¹²³ *L’Humanité*, n° 1035, 6 January 1948.

¹²⁴ *L’Humanité*, n° 1034, 4-5 January 1948.

¹²⁵ The text of the resolution of the Council Of the Republic (Conseil de la République) as delivered by Roger Duchet in the Senate reads as follows: ‘The Council of the Republic informs the government that the French film industry is facing serious difficulties in spite of a number of measures taken to remedy same. It calls for a rapid revision of the Blum-Byrnes agreements, on tax relief, cash advances for film production and the creation of grants for film production and exports’, *France-Film-Information*, December 1947, pp. 1 & 4.

Not surprisingly, the politics of confrontation the PCF was following both at a national level in its battle against the ‘American party’ and at a film level given the virulous — not to say vicious — campaign against the role played by Léon Blum in the Washington agreements, aroused controversy. In its coverage of the 5 January 1948 demonstration, the professional magazine *Le Film français* stressed the political character of the rally. While recognising the existence of the crisis, its leader writer hinted at some hidden political agenda without identifying its origins.¹²⁶ Although it specified that the information might not be fully reliable, the magazine suggested later that the CDCF was linked to the Cominform.¹²⁷ Over the weeks and months that followed its creation, the CDCF denied on several occasions that it was under the control of any political party.¹²⁸

Undisturbed, the PCF continued its crusade, sure of being in the right. *L’Humanité* regularly reported the activities and actions of the CDCF while at the same time calling for more spectators’ committees of defence.¹²⁹ These committees received a remarkable response both from the public and the trade’s workforce. A meeting organised on 30 May 1948 claimed the support of 300 000 Parisian spectators; actors as popular as Tino Rossi or Bourvil wired their support.¹³⁰ In addition, the Party dealt with the issue at a parliamentary level. In February 1948, on Fernand Grenier’s initiative, the media commission of the National Assembly called for a revision of the Blum-Byrnes agreements.¹³¹ In May, while criticising the governmental proposal to raise the price of cinema seats, the Communist

¹²⁶ ‘Solutions à la crise?’, *Le Film français*, n° 161, 9 January 1948, p. 5.

¹²⁷ ‘Le Comité de Défense du Cinéma Français a exposé son point de vue aux parlementaires’, *Le Film français*, n° 169, 5 March 1948, p. 7.

¹²⁸ *L’Humanité*, n° 1045, 17 January 1948; ‘Le Comité de Défense du Cinéma Français souligne son caractère apolitique’, *Le Film français*, n° 170, 12 March 1948, p. 5; ‘The Comité de défense du cinéma... denies following a particular ideological line or being affiliated to a political party’, *L’Humanité*, n° 1099, 19 March 1948.

¹²⁹ ‘Multipliez les comités de spectateurs contre l’invasion des navets américains et les accords Blum-Byrnes. Comité de Défense du Cinéma Français, 92, Champs-Élysées, Paris’, *L’Humanité*, n° 1058, 31 January 1948; ‘Constitution d’un Comité Universitaire de Défense du Cinéma Français, jeudi dernier au Cluny-Palace par 600 étudiants’, *ibid.*, n° 1061, 4 February 1948; ‘Les Comités de Défense du Cinéma poussent comme des champignons’, *ibid.*, n° 1117, 9 April 1948.

¹³⁰ Obviously there was no resentment between Tino Rossi and the CLCF, although the singer had been heard by the purge commission at the Liberation, ‘Il faut créer un psychose d’amour du Cinéma Français’ *L’Humanité*, n° 1161, 1 June 1948.

¹³¹ *L’Humanité*, n° 1063, 6 February 1948.

deputy proposed a subsidy of 1 billion francs to allow for the production of one hundred films per year; through a 25 per cent taxing of the receipts on foreign films, he explained, the State would recover the billion francs allocated to French productions. He also called for a screen quota of seven weeks out of thirteen, and a reciprocity in terms of importation.¹³² Towards the end of May *France Nouvelle* published two articles entitled 'How to save French Cinema' which summed up the PCF's position. The first of the two articles stigmatised the 'false protectors of French cinema', namely the Socialists, for laying the blame on French distributors and cinema owners instead of rejecting the agreements themselves. The second summed up the Party's proposals to cure French cinema: a screen quota of seven weeks out of thirteen for French films, taxation of dubbed foreign films, state subventions to stimulate film production (1 billion francs), prevention of seats price increase and, as could be expected, abolishing the Blum-Byrnes agreements.¹³³ In August 1948, the Communist weekly reproduced Fernand Grenier's intervention at the National Assembly under the explicit headline: 'The Communist Party is the only one to defend French cinema against the American party'. In his address the deputy criticised the Parliament's rejection of the proposals of the CDCF (as outlined above) and reasserted the PCF's commitment to defending French cinema.¹³⁴ The Party's active participation both within the Committees of defence and within parliament came to the fore during the debates which took place in June 1948 when professionals — Pierre Prévert, Jacques Becker, Jean Delannoy — were among the audience listening carefully to the different proposals put forward.¹³⁵

While asserting the dominating role of the PCF, the *France Nouvelle*'s articles pointed to the overall consensus which by Spring 1948 underlined the need for a review of the agreements, which led to the Paris agreements, signed in September 1948. The most striking measure was the increase of the screen quota from four to five weeks out of every thirteen.

¹³² Fernand Grenier, 'Le milliard du cinéma français', *L'Humanité*, n° 1150, 19 May 1948.

¹³³ 'Comment sauver le cinéma français, I. Les astuces des faux défenseurs', *France Nouvelle*, n° 127, 22 May 1948, p. 10; 'Comment sauver le cinéma français, II. Il nous faut des films français', *France Nouvelle*, n° 128, 29 May 1948, p. 10.

¹³⁴ 'A l'Assemblée nationale, seuls, contre le parti américain, les Communistes défendent le cinéma français', *France Nouvelle*, n° 138, 7 August 1948, p. 11.

¹³⁵ *L'Humanité*, n° 1186, 30 June 1948.

Whereas for historians, such as Jean Pivasset, this change illustrated the complete success of the protest against the Blum agreements, for the PCF this measure constituted a facade behind which the USA would consolidate their implantation in France.¹³⁶ The main clause of the new agreements was, according to the French Communists, the possibility for American producers to reinvest in France the profits which were blocked there since July 1947: 'Thus what would seem to be given with one hand would be taken back with the other.'¹³⁷

The review of the Blum-Byrnes agreements did not make *L'Humanité's* front page. In 1948, the Cold War was only starting, and the anti-American campaign would remain relentless. Indeed the ideological facet of the PCF's involvement was so important that it hardly mentions the setting up of the *loi d'aide* on September 1948, as a victory, although it is now seen by most as one of the greatest long-lasting achievement of the industry's mobilisation against the Washington Agreements.¹³⁸ Likewise the creation of the *Centre National de la Cinématographie* (CNC) on 25 October 1946 had been passed over in silence. Following the failure of the CLCF to retain control of the reorganisation of the industry, the worsening relationship between the PCF and the government, and the breaking out of the Cold War, little good could come from the government's quarter. The PCF was so stuck in its oppositional attitude that it could not even see when its policy and campaigning reaped some benefits.

The importance of the battle against the Washington agreements can be best appreciated by the place it has since taken in French Communist history. The Blum-Byrnes agreements will be mentioned repeatedly in the course of this study.¹³⁹ Moreover, the controversy among historians as to their real influence on the French film industry bears testimony to their

¹³⁶ 'The success of this massive wave of protest against the Blum-Byrnes agreements is complete', Jean Pivasset, *Essai sur la signification politique du cinéma; l'exemple français, de la libération aux événements de Mai 1968* (Paris: Cujas, 1971), p. 91.

¹³⁷ Armand Monjo, 'Le gouvernement Blum-Reynaud-Marie installera-t-il sur le sol français les trusts américains du cinéma — Rumeur de révision des accords Blum-Byrnes', *L'Humanité*, n° 1231, 21 August 1948.

¹³⁸ See Billard, p. 505. For a negative view of the consequences of the battle against the Blum-Byrnes agreements, see Marc Fumaroli, *L'État culturel* (Paris: Éditions de Fallois, 1991), pp 180-181.

¹³⁹ See chapters 3, p. 126; 7, pp. 272 & 275.

political dimension. It is worth spending a moment looking at what an historian has called the ‘legend of the Blum-Byrnes agreements’.¹⁴⁰

1.2.2. The Blum-Byrnes Agreements: a Hypnotised Film Industry?

I have outlined the fact that the Communist campaign against the Blum-Byrnes agreements took place in two different stages: the first in the wake of the signing of the agreements, the second one a year later. At first sight, the rekindling of the protest appears to have been politically motivated whereas the first wave of protest seems more spontaneous. Yet in both instances, the French film industry was very much involved in the campaign. This raises two different questions. The first has to do with the influence of the PCF in the film trade. The second one arises from the on-going debate about the actual repercussions of the agreements on the French film industry at the time. The answers to these questions are not unrelated.

For most commentators 28 May 1946 is the black Tuesday of post-war French cinema. Yet in recent years, dissenting voices have been heard in the overall consensus which has characterised the general opinion on the Blum-Byrnes agreements. In 1986, Jacques Portes wrote that the agreements, at the time of their signing and in spite of the heavy climate which presided over the negotiations, ‘appear to have been a success for France’.¹⁴¹ For Portes the Blum-Byrnes agreements actually saved the French film industry. If this were the case, it was a battle without losers since the front page of the American newspaper *The Film Daily* dated 28 May 1946 bears the headline ‘FRENCH PACT IS U.S. INDUSTRY VICTORY’.¹⁴² For the Americans to obtain a screen quota of four weeks out of thirteen was undoubtedly a victory; moreover, according to the agreements, the quota would be eliminated over a set period. It is difficult to see how this could be seen as a success for France unless one

¹⁴⁰ Jacques Portes, ‘Les origines de la légende noire des accords Blum-Byrnes’, *Revue d’histoire moderne et contemporaine*, numéro spécial ‘Cinéma et société’, ed. by Jean A. Gili, April-June 1986, pp. 314-329.

¹⁴¹ Ibid.

¹⁴² The article goes on: ‘Representing an “overwhelming victory” for the American industry, the picture trade agreement is expected to be announced by the State Department today... [...] Although the new agreement is essentially a “protection” for French interests, it represents a victory for the United States industry...’, *The Film Daily*, 28 May 1946, in ‘Le pacte français est une victoire pour l’industrie américaine’, *Les Lettres Françaises*, n° 118, 26 July 1946, pp. 1 & 8.

expected complete capitulation. In 1992, the French film historian Jean-Pierre Jeancolas published an article in which he expressed an opinion similar to Portes's. Jeancolas firmly believes that during the three determining quarters of the period concerned, namely the last quarter of 1946 and the first two quarters of 1947 — the agreements acted as 'an umbrella which protected and probably saved the French film industry from the on-coming Hollywood downpour'.¹⁴³ He adds that the agreements were all the more efficient since the French production was 'for 90% qualitatively disqualified' and the French public was very eager to see American films. Yet he acknowledges that he cannot base his view on facts since the conduct of millions of spectators nearly fifty years ago, he adds, would be too difficult to assess. This is precisely what Patricia Hubert-Lacombe did when she reassessed the cliché of a French public starving for Hollywood products. She shows that after a short-lived craze for American films after the Liberation, as early as 1948 there was a disaffection with American films. In addition, she reminds her readers that 61% of the French people answering a 1947 poll on film preferences preferred French films against 8% favouring American films.¹⁴⁴

Jeancolas spends the rest of his article explaining how the PCF used the Blum-Byrnes agreements as a means to attack the Socialists during the venomous political campaigns which marked the Cold War era. This, as outlined above, cannot be denied. If it is true that in 1946 'the Blum-Byrnes agreements were not yet a Party political hobby-horse', Jean-Pierre Jeancolas is not accurate when he writes that 'there was no mention of the film clause in any French daily'. He fails to mention that the film arrangement was outlined in the Communist daily on 30 May 1946 and that as early as 31 May 1946, *L'Humanité* underlined the possible negative consequences of the agreements on the French film industry.¹⁴⁵ True, at the time, the PCF's hobby-horse was the 'battle for production' and the Franco-American agreements constituted an element of the plan to reconstruct the country's economy. The

¹⁴³ Jean-Pierre Jeancolas, 'L'arrangement des accords Blum-Byrnes à l'épreuve des faits. Les relations (cinématographiques) franco-américaines de 1944 à 1948', 1895, n° 13, December 1992, pp. 1-49. See also Jeancolas, 'From the Blum-Byrnes Agreement to the GATT affair', in *Hollywood and Europe, Economics, Culture, National Identity 1945-1995*, ed. by Geoffrey Nowell-Smith and Steven Ricci, eds, (London: BFI, 1998), pp. 44-62.

¹⁴⁴ Patricia Hubert-Lacombe, 'L'accueil des films américains pendant la guerre froide (1946-1953)', *Revue d'histoire moderne et contemporaine*, vol. 33, April-June 1986, p. 310.

¹⁴⁵ See above, notes 75-80.

ratification of the agreements by the Communist deputies was as political a move as, a year later, their using them against what they called 'the American party'.

As Jeancolas himself admits, he cannot base his firm belief that the French film industry would have collapsed if it were not for the Blum-Byrnes agreement on facts. So much has been said and written now that it is difficult to close the debate for good with a definitive answer. French cinema did not die in 1946 or 1947. Nevertheless the massive reaction of the profession both in phase one and in phase two cannot simply be explained by the PCF's capacity to mobilise opinion. Many among the protestors were not affiliated to the Party and would not have accepted being led by it blindly, Marcel L'Herbier is a case in point. The fact is that by May 1948 professionals as far from the PCF as could be imagined — Charles Ford, Maurice Bessy and others — also called for a revision of the agreements. Their analyses of the shortcomings of the Blum-Byrnes agreements differed from that of the PCF, but they all agreed that the situation of the French film industry was worse than two years before. The PCF may have been playing on the French film trade's fears to an extent, but it was not in a position to hypnotise the entire industry to adopt its politics. I tend therefore to agree with Geneviève Sellier's point of view. For Sellier, the campaign for a rehabilitation of the Blum-Byrnes agreements was inspired by external political motives, i.e. to restore the Socialists' post-war image.¹⁴⁶ There are many aspects of the PCF's politics which deserve criticism, but the stance over the defence of the French film industry, even given its political sub-text, is not one of them. The main achievement of the campaign against the Blum-Byrnes agreements was its ability to rally the great majority of the industry's workforce, independently of their status within the film trade.¹⁴⁷ It is an ability it has retained to the present day.

¹⁴⁶ Geneviève Sellier, 'L'après-guerre: contradictions d'un auteur', *La Pensée*, n° 300, Winter 1993-1994, p. 45.

¹⁴⁷ Sellier, 'Le précédent des accords Blum-Byrnes', *Le Monde diplomatique*, n° 476, November 1993, p. 15.

1.2.3. The Fight for the Defence of French Cinema Goes On

Within the film industry the debate around the defence of French cinema turned political to the extreme. The Communists kept on campaigning against Hollywood and calling on the French government to grant more subsidies to French productions. In each of his declarations and parliamentary interventions, Fernand Grenier called for a two billion francs aid to the film industry instead of the one billion francs he used to advocate granting the industry. By looking at *L'Écran français* and the Communist periodicals of the period, it appears that those who had participated in the campaigns against the Washington agreements remained mobilised after the 1948 Paris agreements. True, the revision of the Blum-Byrnes agreements did not mean that the commercial relationship between the two countries had been settled for good. On the contrary, since the 1948 agreements had only a four year life span, the two countries soon re-embarked on new discussions. Whatever these were, they nurtured fresh rumours about Hollywood's new demands, which in turn never failed to rekindle the activist ardour of both the *Comités de Défense du Cinéma Français* and the *Fédération du spectacle*. In both structures, the French Communist Party had the upper hand. While the PCF had been openly instrumental in the setting up of the *Comités de Défense*, it also held prime position within the *Fédération du spectacle* since this union was affiliated to the CGT. Born out of the years of Occupation and Resistance — but with roots which go further back in the 1930s, the *Fédération du Spectacle* established itself at the end of the war as the only legitimate representative organisation of the French film workforce. Given the mood which prevailed at the time, its credentials made it a very powerful organisation within the film industry.¹⁴⁸ In fact the *Fédération du Spectacle* came to enjoy the kind of privileged status only the dockers and the print workforce (*ouvriers du livre*) could boast of. In both these unions, a closed shop system operated. It was virtually impossible to work as a docker or a printer if one was not affiliated to the corresponding CGT branch. This comfortable status explains why its grassroots membership was made of film technicians from quarters

¹⁴⁸ On the power of the CGT in the film industry, see Colin Crisp, *The Classic French Cinema, 1930-1960* (Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 1993), pp. 198-202.

that reached beyond the Communist sphere. It may also explain why the campaigns of the early 1950s still claimed the support of an impressive part of the film industry workforce. When one looks at the names of the participants in the different campaigns of the period, one finds many a Communist activist or fellow-traveller of course, but also many who were not, never had been and never would be, Party members. This has often raised the question of the sincerity of some of the non-Communist sympathisers within the union who nevertheless joined in every action it would engage in.¹⁴⁹ This is an issue which cannot be answered with any degree of certainty. I have not encountered any film professional's report admitting that any degree of participation in the militant activities of the *Fédération du Spectacle* was a result of coercion.

Standing out from the never-ceasing rumbling of disagreement and complaint, two campaigns for the defence of French cinema took place in the early 1950s, one in 1950 and the other in 1952. In 1950 the main lines of yet another manifesto defending French production was published and made public in *L'Humanité Dimanche*.¹⁵⁰ Calls for a stricter control of imported films, a larger share of French films in the screen quota system, along with an increase of governmental funding and a democratisation of censorship were approved and signed by a list of well-known names within the industry. A public meeting duly followed the publication of the Manifesto.¹⁵¹ In July 1952, as the 1948 Paris agreements were coming to an end, the film industry mobilised once again. Another campaign to prevent the death of French cinema was launched and received considerable support from the

¹⁴⁹ See for instance Jean Delannoy's letter, appendice 2, p. 346.

¹⁵⁰ 'Un manifeste du cinéma français — Contre le "retour" aux accords Blum-Byrnes', *L'Humanité Dimanche*, n° 101, 3 September 1950. Signatories included Alexandre Arnoux, film writer; Claude Autant-Lara, director; Raymond Bussières, actor; Marcel Carné, director; Louis Daquin, director; Roger Désormières, composer; Jean Dréville, director; Jean Gehret, director; Fernand Gravey, actor; Jean Grémillon, director; Pierre Laroche, film writer; Pierre Lévy, producer; Marcel L'Herbier, director; J.-P. Le Chanois, director; André Luguet, actor; Léon Moussinac, film critic; Noël-Noël, actor; Louis Page, photographer; André Paulvé, producer; Gérard Philipe, actor; Annette Poivre, actress; Vladimir Pozner, film writer; Pierre Prévert, director; Emile Reinert, director; Pierre Renoir, actor; Françoise Rosay, actress; Georges Sadoul, film critic; Armand Salacrou, film writer; Charles Spaak, film writer; Alexandre Trauner, set designer.

¹⁵¹ 'Françoise Rosay, Bernard Blier, Annette Poivre et Raymond Bussières explain why they will be at Pleyel on the 26th of October with artists, film professionals and spectators to express their willingness to defend French cinema, which is under death threat', *L'Humanité Dimanche*, n° 108, 22 October 1950.

trade.¹⁵² The PCF's and the *Fédération du Spectacle*'s intensive corporatist campaigns won them considerable support among the film workforce.¹⁵³ Confirmation of that can be found in the film trade's support of the Peace movement. With on the one hand, the USA, safely protected by the Atlantic Ocean and busy repressing, thanks to Senator McCarthy, its most radical elements, and on the other hand, Eastern Europe under Soviet rule, Western Europe was soon transformed into the ideological battleground of the Cold War. By the end of 1947, the Western European governments had become the objective allies of Washington, while Western Communist parties, mostly in Italy and France, acted as relays of the USSR, a position made all the more effective by the place they occupied in their respective national political landscapes and the considerable electoral support they enjoyed at the time.

For both Moscow and Washington, Western Europe represented the ideal location to wage their war. They did so overtly through political parties, but also secretly, thanks to many organisations, movements and foundations, the ideological slant of which was not always easily decipherable, at least as far as the 'American side' was concerned.¹⁵⁴ Moscow-inspired propaganda was more readily recognisable : any action, petition or demonstration organised by Western Communist parties could indeed be suspected to be either inspired, dictated and partly funded by the USSR.

The most well-known of these was the Peace Movement that was launched in the late 1940s and lasted well into the mid-1950s. The 'Stockholm appeal', a worldwide campaign orchestrated by Moscow against the use of the atomic bomb, gathered signatures from almost every quarter of the population all over the world. In France, the Peace Movement was high on the PCF's and its satellite organisations' agenda, and between 1949 and 1952 the PCF's press published endless calls supporting the Peace movement, daily reporting on the activities

¹⁵² 'S.O.S. du cinéma français', *L'Écran français*, n° 421, 4-10 July 1952, pp. 1 & 10; *ibid.*, n° 422, 11-18 July 1952, p. 10. The signatories were Danielle Delorme, Jean Delannoy, François Chalais, George Lacombe, René Clair, Charles Spaak, Noël-Noël, Berthomieu, Gaby Morlay, Louis Daquin, Gérard Philipe, Fernand Gravey, Jean Painlevé, Jean Dréville, Claude Autant-Lara, Françoise Rosay, Yves Ciampi, Yves Montand et Simone Signoret, Jacques Daroy, J. Bertheau, Carlo Rim.

¹⁵³ See appendice 4, p. 349.

¹⁵⁴ On this topic, see *CIA and the Arts*, a programme broadcast by Channel 4 on how the CIA secretly sponsored leftist contemporary visual artists as both a window of the freedom enjoyed by artists in the USA. and a response to Zhdanovist art, Channel 4, October-November 1995; see also *Hidden Hands* (London: Channel 4 Television, 1995), pp. 24-31.

of its Committees as well as listing the names of any new famous national or international signatory. *L'Écran français*, a film weekly which by 1949 was part of the French Communist-controlled press, echoed the campaign and devoted numerous articles to the endorsement of the '*Appel de Stockholm*' by French Film directors, actors or technicians.¹⁵⁵ The signatories of this extra-cinematographic action originated mainly from the leftist flanks of the profession — every single member of the powerful Communist-controlled '*Fédération du Spectacle*' must have signed a Peace petition — but reached out also to a wider audience.¹⁵⁶ The Peace movement was worth mentioning in so far as it shows the lasting influence of Communist politics within the film industry. It was also easy for Communist activists to link the fight for Peace with the defense of French cinema since in both cases the aggressor was the United States. Campaigning for one often went along campaigning for the other.

1.2.4. The Cold War within the Film Industry

With the advent of the Cold War, the political divisions within the film industry came to the fore. Whatever unity had been displayed between employers and employees soon vanished into the bitter cold atmosphere of the times. The employer sector — producers, distributors and cinema owners — never failed to point out the ideological dimension of the actions instigated by the unions or supported by the PCF and made known their position in the corporate press they controlled. In *France-Film-Export*, Charles Ford feared that the 1950 *L'Humanité* Manifesto might jeopardise the film negotiations between France and the USA. While he accused the PCF for having been the initiator of such an 'untimely' agitation, he also castigated the non-Communist signatories for having lent their names to it. Three years later, even before the figures for the French film production for the year 1952-1953 became public, the trade journal *Le Film français* sarcastically took the *Comités de Défense* and the *Fédération du Spectacle* to task: 'Although it might be too early to look back on the

¹⁵⁵ '*L'Écran français* dans la lutte pour la paix', *L'Écran français*, n° 245, 13 March 1950, p. 12.

¹⁵⁶ Jacques Chirac, the current French President, was among its signatories.

figures of 1953, a clear picture of the production of the last eleven months already emerges. It is a scathing refutation of defeat-mongers and professional brooders who, last year, wrote the death certificate of our cinema. A funny corpse indeed, who had not breathed its last and yet was buried under ink and words, hastily peppered with grimacing funeral orations.’¹⁵⁷

When Charles Ford denounced the political motivations behind the PCF’s involvement in the film industry, he did so in veiled terms, never confronting the Communists head-on.¹⁵⁸ Direct and violent attacks against the Party came from other quarters, namely from within the union movement. The radicalisation of the PCF’s politics in 1947 had led to a similar response of the CGT. On 19 December 1947 this provoked the departure from the Communist-led union of those opposing the new hard pro-Soviet line, who, under the leadership of Léon Jouhaux, went on to form, thanks to the support — both financial and ideological — of American unions, the *Confédération Générale du Travail — Force Ouvrière* (CGT-FO) the founding Congress of which took place on 12 April 1948. The close relationship between the CGT and the PCF was well known. Indeed, the union was rightly described as the Party’s transmission belt in the French industrial sector. For such a split to occur in the year it did comes as no surprise. It was a direct consequence of the era’s ideological struggle.

Needless to say, the PCF and the CGT were quick to denounce the secessionist CGT-FO as a US-controlled anti-Communist organisation. While this does not take into account the pre-WWII long-standing divisions of the French workers’ movement, the prevailing mood of the Cold War led to tough ideological battles. If one judges the anti-Communist stance of the CGT-FO by looking at its activity in the film sector, one gets a precise and definite answer: yes, the CGT-FO was indeed a vociferously anti-Communist union.

¹⁵⁷ ‘French cinema is not dead — 1953, a good year for our production’, *Le Film français*, n° 489, 20 November 1953, pp. 5-6.

¹⁵⁸ ‘[...] All this smacks of the interests of a small political group which tries to monopolise the defence of French cinema but merely ends up spreading confusion and provocation. And it is most unfortunate to see women and men of considerable merit lending their authority to such admittedly spectacular demonstrations that have nevertheless no connection with the true defence of our national production’, Charles Ford, ‘Beaucoup de bruit pour rien’, *France-Film-Export*, November 1950, p. 3. See also Ford, ‘Les dangers d’un manifeste’, *France-Film-Export*, August-September 1950, pp. 3-4.

A branch of the CGT-FO was set up in the film industry. Its main task was to blame the PCF for all the difficulties the film industry was facing. In 1950, the '*Fédération syndicaliste des spectacles Force Ouvrière*' issued what can undoubtedly be called an anti-Communist pamphlet entitled *Les Naufrageurs du cinéma français*.¹⁵⁹ This sixteen-page brochure was almost entirely devoted to the vilification of Communist involvement in the film industry. It denounced the absolute control of the Communists over the corporation through what FO saw as on the one hand, the omnipotence of the *Fédération du Spectacle* and on the other hand, the unbounded servility of the French government towards the PCF. The exaggeration of the tone as well as the nastiness of the attacks managed to outdo the Stalinist rhetoric in both hatred and bad faith. While the *Fédération du Spectacle*'s undoubtedly enjoyed a particularly privileged status within French film industry, it is harder to figure out how, in 1950, French Communists could have masterminded or even influenced the government's film policy. For instance, Jean Grémillon's *Le Printemps de la liberté* was given as a typical example of Communist favouritism whereas the film, a state-sponsored project to celebrate the 1848 Revolution, was in fact censored and could not be completed.¹⁶⁰ While *Les Naufrageurs du cinéma français* targeted the PCF, a year later, in another publication entitled *La Crise du cinéma français, ses causes, ses remèdes*, the CGT-FO attacked the positions of the *Fédération du Spectacle*. Systematically saying the opposite of what the Communist-led union said, it dismisses all the main arguments put forward by the CGT. It refutes the idea that foreign competition, fall in consumers' purchasing power, lack of commitment shown by the authorities, and heavy tax burden on film are the main causes of the crisis, instead blaming the abuses within a trade that is controlled by the *Fédération du Spectacle* while calling for an overall reorganisation of the industry.¹⁶¹ In his October 1952 report to the Media Commission of the National Assembly M. Lanet echoed some of the arguments put forward by the *Fédération Syndicaliste du Spectacle*, stressing that the

¹⁵⁹ Fédération Syndicaliste des Spectacles (Force Ouvrière), *Les Naufrageurs du cinéma français* (Paris: Force ouvrière, 1951), Paris, Bibliothèque de l'Arsenal, 4 W. 4446.

¹⁶⁰ See Pierre Kast's introduction to the film's script, in Jean Grémillon, *Le Printemps de la liberté* (Paris: La Bibliothèque Française, 1948).

¹⁶¹ Fédération Syndicaliste des Spectacles (Force Ouvrière), *La Crise du cinéma français, ses causes, ses remèdes* (Paris: Force ouvrière, 1952), Paris, Bibliothèque de l'Arsenal, 4 W. 4446.

causes of the crisis as exposed by the CGT could not explain everything, but that the crisis 'was above all a structural one, the conjectural and present aspects of which only constituted the external part.'¹⁶² Voices opposing the views of the *Fédération du Spectacle* could therefore be heard within the national institutions. In 1953, *Force Ouvrière*, in association with a number of other non-CGT unions — CFTC, *Autonomes* —, began to publish its own periodical, *L'Écho du Spectacle*, 'organe du cartel syndicaliste libre du spectacle'. Echoing the forementioned brochure, 99 % of the articles of this corporate magazine were denunciations of, and attacks on, the PCF and the *Fédération du Spectacle*. The climax of this ideological battle came when one of its leaders, André Le Bourre, was dismissed from the CNC by Mr. Fourré-Cormeray. According to the 'Union Cartel', this was the result of Communist manoeuvring in order to take total control over the whole film industry. A detailed, albeit biased, account of what happened can be found and, interestingly, read either in French, English or Italian in *Air-Terre-Mer*, a magazine which has little to do with cinema and much with Cold War propaganda.¹⁶³ Apart from articles published in two anti-Communist periodicals — *Carrefour* in February 1952,¹⁶⁴ and *La République Libre* in April of the same year¹⁶⁵ — the 'Le Bourre affair' does not seem to have caused much stir either within or without the corporation. As was symptomatic of the Cold War era, there was little room for a middle-of-the road position. Yet one needed to be a heartfelt anti-Communist to join the *Cartel syndicaliste*. The PCF's involvement as well as the commanding presence of the CGT within the film corporation ensured that the two organisations retained their influence in the industry, even though one did not necessarily subscribe to the Stalin-inspired policies of the Party.

¹⁶² *Le Film Français*, n° 427, 17 October 1952, p. 3.

¹⁶³ 'Raymond Le Bourre Reveals Communist Influence in the French Film Industry', *Air-Terre-Mer*, n° 10, March 1952 (2). For the article in full, see appendice n° 5, p. 350.

¹⁶⁴ 'Le cinéma français livré aux communistes', *Carrefour*, n° 386, 6 February 1952.

¹⁶⁵ *La République Libre*, n° 163, 18 April 1952.

1.2.5. Europe in the Line of Fire

Around 1952-1953 the Communist-led campaigns took on an anti-European slant, while retaining their anti-US component. This should come as no surprise to anyone. With on the one hand Western Europe clearly on the American side, and on the other hand the PCF sticking to its own nationalistic views, the idea of Europe as the miraculous solution to the difficulties of French cinema was bound to be refuted by the PCF with the utmost vigour. Moreover, as I would like to show now, the first proponents of a 'European cinema' were clearly on the anti-Communist side. Since most Western European States were clearly on the U.S. side, any idea of cooperation between Western European States were dismissed by the PCF as American manoeuvring and White-House-inspired policy. From the creation of the European Coal and Steel Community in 1951 to the Treaty of Rome in 1957 which laid the foundations of the Common Market, French Communists relentlessly denounced the successive European agreements, claiming that they served American interests and went contrary to the national interest. While towards the end of the 1950s, the anti-American dimension of the anti-Common Market campaigning was somewhat subdued, in the late 1940s and early 1950s it took precedence over any other argument. If a move towards European unity in terms of Defence, Economy and Politics was deemed dangerous, the same move in terms of the film industry was greeted in the same way.

It is once again Louis Daquin who first outlined the Communist position at great length in the columns of *L'Humanité*. In an article called 'The plot against our national spirit and culture. 'European Cinema — 'blue pool' — threatens French film production' the film director explains how the Communists view the idea of a European cinema as part of an overall plan aimed at reinforcing the Western camp:

All those who, over the last six years, have been fighting for the defence of a French-born art and industry, are today fully aware of the political dimension of their struggle. It is therefore belatedly and coyly that the European conceptions in terms of film were launched. These were destined to serve and propagate the European Idea, the ideological framework of the Schuman plan.

The first strategic offensive was the setting up of the European Centre of Entertainment, under the aegis of Robert Schuman, André Marie, and Charles Brune,

who never brought their support to the *Comité de Défense du Cinéma Français*. And who are the initiators of this Centre ? First of all, Le Bourre, a member of both Force Ouvrière and the Socialist party. With him one finds a Robert Becq and a Letué, who were deprived of their Union rights at the Liberation, only one director, that same Joannon who was head of the *Famille professionnelle du Spectacle* during the Occupation; six actors, three of which were banned at the Liberation and finally, Mr Trichet, the president of the *Fédération des exploitants de salles de cinéma*, who since 1947 opposed every action and measure taken for saving the French film industry.

The 'CES' is fiercely hostile to the subordination of the industry to an ideology or a political party... The artist who creates must be able to exert his art without having to yield to a discipline other than that imposed by the aesthetics he has chosen for himself... without having to endure insidious pressures which lead him to follow directly or indirectly a political party line.

It is Le Bourre who says that one needs to "defend the true mission of Cinema by taking politics out of the industry and opening up beyond national borders", and Trichet, MacCarthy's French help who, accusing the Communists, says that "our screens need to be purged and our film makers allowed to express themselves as free artists." The notion of fatherland will give way to the notion of humanity and international art will destroy retrograde jingoism.¹⁶⁶

In the January 1955 issue of *La Cinématographie française*, P.-A. Harlé's editorial entitled 'Cinema of Europe' constituted both another call for a European cinema, and a vibrant appeal to the unification of Europe. One which could only send a shiver down any Communist spine. In his article, Mr Harlé lists as evidence of progress towards European unity Jean Lecanuet's 'European Film Community' in May 1953, Mr Renato Gualino's 'Production European Pool' in September 1953, as well as Mr Eric Johnston's 'Global Cinema' in January 1954. For him, 'seen from the middle of the Atlantic Ocean, the European peninsula seems hardly larger than the Balkans for a Mediterranean observer and its division into small States no less illogical. European populations have nevertheless a rather similar way of life. In fact, notwithstanding their languages, the only way they could be said to be foreign to each other is through their specific disposition or by subtle regionalisms and customs.' 'Film', he adds, 'allows for this cross-fertilisation of cultures and creates both an atmosphere of coexistence and a common way of looking at the world. The increase of commercial demands, the improvement of techniques, the general trend and people in the film business all call for European unity, and first of all, Western European unity.'¹⁶⁷

¹⁶⁶ Louis Daquin, 'The plot against our national spirit and culture — European cinema threatens French film production', *L'Humanité*, n° 2694, 5 May 1953.

¹⁶⁷ P.-A. Harlé, 'Cinéma d'Europe', *La Cinématographie française*, n° 1600/n° spécial, January 1955, p. 7.

In 1954, the PCF published yet another anti-American pamphlet dealing with film matters, *Menaces sur le cinéma* (*Threats hanging over cinema*) the cover of which, tellingly, displayed a still from Jean Delannoy's *Destinées* showing Michelle Morgan as Joan of Arc. In this 61-page publication, the Communist writer(s) reassessed American film expansionism in France since the end of the war. The idea of a European cinema is pinpointed as yet another weapon used by the Americans to extend their hold over world cinema: 'By every possible means, Hollywood has tried to monopolise world film production for its own benefit and to become the film centre of the Western world. In order to achieve this aim, it needs a 'European' subsidiary. And so, in conjunction with the projects of a Defence European Community, aimed at helping the rearmament of the Reichswehr, there appears the project of a European Film Community, a European Film Pool.'¹⁶⁸ The manifesto then lists the different disadvantages a move towards a European Film Community would bring to the French film industry. First of all, it underlines the social consequences of such a move: 'As is the case with the *Communauté du Charbon et de l'Acier*, a European Film Community would imperil the social advantages enjoyed by French film workers since the European countries where these social advantages are not so advanced would be used as default. In other words, this would result in French technicians giving up the social victories their struggle have brought to them.'¹⁶⁹ The harmful political dimension of European cinema from a French Communist viewpoint is also stressed. There was indeed no hidden agenda among the proponents of European cinema. They set out their ideological intentions very clearly in an open letter to Mr Louvel in December 1952 which the Communist manifesto quotes at great length. In this letter, they explain that 'film ought to take part in the necessary political construction of Europe. The choice of subject-matter co-produced by the free European countries should be instrumental in achieving moral unity through the use of great moral and human themes.' This according to the Communist writers meant that the subject-matter of the film was to become 'cosmopolitan and to have as little to do as possible with national

¹⁶⁸ PCF, *Menaces sur le cinéma* (Paris: La Nouvelle Critique, 1954), p. 47.

¹⁶⁹ Ibid., pp. 51-52.

reality'.¹⁷⁰ The damaging consequences of a European Film Community in terms of censorship are also underlined.¹⁷¹ Not surprisingly, the Communist manifesto could only conclude by asking the following question: 'Is the national dimension of film bound to become a thing from the past ?'¹⁷²

Since the advocates of European film integration positioned themselves as defenders of Western moral values against Eastern Europe, the Communist rejection of a European Film Community should not come as a surprise. It went against everything the PCF stood for in the ideology-dominated early 1950s. Yet, when one puts the Communist position in perspective, a different picture emerges, one which is not so cut-and-dried. Looking closely at the Communist press of the period, one wonders why, in view of the Communist condemnation of European cinema, there was hardly any mention or criticism made of coproductions. In December 1950, *Les Lettres françaises* wrote that 'these combinations [i.e. coproductions] could, in the short term, be beneficial to the films on the foreign market' while it nevertheless stressed that 'the cosmopolitanism of the distribution and financial combinations always tended to adulterate the quality of the production.'¹⁷³ In 1953, *L'Humanité* said 'No to coproductions', but at issue were Franco-Spanish coproductions, which for obvious political reasons the PCF could not condone.¹⁷⁴ The PCF was well aware that coproductions, of which Franco-Italian productions constituted the great majority, represented a possible answer to the economic domination of American cinema.¹⁷⁵ Many a director who supported the Party's different initiatives for the defence of French cinema worked on coproductions: Christian-Jaque, René Clément, Jean Delannoy, René Clair, Yves Allégret among others. A certain bad faith actually governed the PCF's attitude towards

¹⁷⁰ In Stalinist terminology cosmopolitanism was defined as 'a reactionary bourgeois ideology, advocating indifference to national interests and traditions and relinquishing national sovereignty', in *Petit Dictionnaire philosophique*, ed. by M. Rosenthal and P. Ioudine (Moscou: Éditions en langues étrangères, 1955), p. 101.

¹⁷¹ *Menaces sur le cinéma*, p. 53.

¹⁷² *Ibid.*, p. 54.

¹⁷³ Sadoul, 'Un feuilleton calligraphié, *Le Château de verre* de René Clément', *Les Lettres françaises*, n° 342, 21 December 1950, p. 7.

¹⁷⁴ *L'Humanité*, n° 2650, 13 March 1950.

¹⁷⁵ On the topic of coproduction as a European answer to Hollywood, see Billard, pp. 520-524, and Crisp, pp. 79-86.

coproductions. When the PCF approved of a film, it always failed to mention that it had been coproduced. For instance the Franco-Italian Christian-Jaque film *Fanfan la Tulipe* was praised to the skies by Janine Bouissounouse as a ‘typically French film’.¹⁷⁶ In the early 1950s, the PCF’s approach to Europe in terms of film was dual. While rejecting it on ideological grounds, it also acknowledged, in effect rather than in words, its potential as a possible means of resisting American film economic supremacy.

In the period which encompasses the Liberation of France and the first phase of the Cold War, the PCF established itself as a keen defender of the French film industry. Its Resistance activities made it a serious contender for the task of reorganising the industry but political struggle with the Gaullists caused the PCF-led film organisations to relinquish their position. As a result, the French State and the film industry embarked on a long and uneasy relationship. In this context, the PCF became the leading French political force to systematically defend the film industry. The difficult economic relation with the American film trade proved ideal for the PCF to anchor its image of champion of the film industry, the Cold War only adding new impetus to the Party’s demands. Many of the discussions which took place during the late 1940s and 1950s would reemerge at later periods, in particular those relating to the relation with Hollywood or the survival of a national cinema. These shall be discussed in subsequent parts. First, I would like to look at the period currently under scrutiny in terms of critical reception. Was the influence of the PCF in the social and economic aspects of the film industry echoed in any way in terms of film aesthetics and style?

¹⁷⁶ *Ce Soir*, 26 February 1952.

Chapter 2: The Liberation and the Cold War:

Critical Reception

The aftermath of World War I was characterised by an explosion of artistic movements reacting to the atrocities of the war and the despair that ensued. Dadaism and Surrealism are well-known examples of vanguard art at its most potent. Following the Russian revolution, which represented hope, and the creation of the French Communist Party in 1920, the links between French Communism and artistic circles grew stronger. A number of artists and intellectuals saw the Communist Party as their natural ally in the promotion of an art which would be revolutionary. The converging repercussions of World War I and Lenin's takeover of Russia seem thus to have contributed to triggering the cultural effervescence of the 1920s and early 1930s. Although World War II upstaged the previous global conflict in horrors and atrocity, neither the Holocaust nor the Hiroshima and Nagasaki nuclear bombs gave birth to artistic and aesthetics upheavals that could compare with those of twenty-five years before. As I would like to show now, the new political circumstances, in particular, the place of the USSR in the world and, in France, that of the PCF were such that they led to a totally different response to the trauma of World War II in the film world and the arts as a whole.

Communist involvement in the film industry at the end of the war has been extensively documented in the first part of this study. What I would like to consider now is how this privileged position among film makers and film workers affected film critics and film writers. What kind of discourse did Communist film critics hold and how did this discourse relate to French film production at the time? More precisely, one may wonder whether the PCF became the advocate of a film aesthetics which would be clearly positioned on the Left and in keeping with a Marxist or Communist ideology.

2.1. Which Cinema for a Liberated France?

One answer to these questions was proffered very early on. In an article published in *Les Lettres françaises* in 1944, Louis Daquin stated that issues of aesthetics were not, and should not be, the main preoccupation of film-makers: 'We must not run astray into speculations about film aesthetics but instead concentrate all our efforts in order to allow, thanks to our cinema, French spirit and culture to quickly exert their influence not only over France but over the world.'¹ Daquin's assertion, with the emphasis on national culture, was significant for two reasons. Firstly, because, as one of the key-players in the reorganisation of the film industry, he was setting the agenda for the first post-war French film-directors. Secondly, because, as a Communist, Daquin's emphasis on the dominance of French culture was also the expression of the cultural policy the PCF had been advocating since before the war. As will be studied now, the critical discourse Communist film critics employed at the end of the war owed much to the recommendations the poet Louis Aragon had made in 1937. After breaking away from the Surrealist movement, Aragon pursued a path which made him the leading Communist figure in matters relating to art and culture. In 1934, a member of the French delegation to the First All Union Congress of Soviet Writers, he listened to Andrei Zhdanov as the latter announced the doctrine of Socialist Realism, by which writers were to become 'engineers of human souls'.² Aragon made this new creed his and the PCF's own but set about gallicising it. In 1937, speaking at a conference, the poet expounded the outlines of the aesthetics he thought the PCF should espouse and promote. Based on the doctrine of socialist realism, the Communist writer appealed for an 'art which would be Socialist in content, but national in form'.³ For Aragon, the only way of reaching Socialism in art was by emphasising the national character of one's artistic production: 'French realism

¹ Louis Daquin, 'L'Écran français', *Les Lettres françaises*, n° 22, 23 September 1944, p. 7.

² David Elliott, 'Moscow, introduction', in *Art and Power — Europe under the Dictators 1930-45*, ed. by Dawn Ades, Tim Benton, David Elliott and Iain Boyd Whyte (London: Hayward Gallery, 1995), p. 187.

³ Dominique Berthet, *Le PCF, la culture et l'art* (Paris: La Table Ronde, 1990), p. 123.

represents the achievement for which, through the centuries, our writers have given the best of themselves, it is the culmination of France's progressive thought.'⁴

The defence of French national culture was therefore one of the PCF's priorities in terms of cultural policy. Given the influence the PCF enjoyed among film professionals and intellectual circles, it does not come as a huge surprise to find this call for a national aesthetics being taken up by a number of film writers at the end of the war. After all, such a position could be expected from artists who had been unable to practise their art freely during four years of foreign occupation. For instance, in addition to Louis Daquin's 1944 article seen above, a short piece from Jean-Paul Sartre, published in *Les Lettres françaises* also borrowed Aragon's views. In it Sartre called for 'great subject-matters that would be popular', adding that 'only the French will be able to bear testimony of their suffering. It will be French cinema's task and duty to portray this in a powerful social fresco.'⁵ This echoed Daquin's own desire for films which would 'both depict the masses in action and appeal to them, films which would be within the reach of the greatest number of people'.⁶ Before examining how Sartre's and Daquin's converging calls were received, it is first necessary to present the outlets which were available to Communist film writers, for, as will be seen, the reception varied according to the source of publication.

2.1.1. The Communist Press

In August 1944, after years of being banned the French Communist press could be printed legally again. Although post-war paper shortages at first limited the range of magazines, *L'Humanité* and *Les Lettres françaises* moved smoothly from clandestine circulation to newsagents' stalls. Not surprisingly for a four-page newspaper, the space devoted to cinema

⁴ Louis Aragon, 'Réalisme socialiste et réalisme français', *Europe*, XLVI, 15 March 1938. Republished in *La Nouvelle Critique*, n° 6, May 1949, pp. 27-39.

⁵ Ironically, Sartre also asked for films where 'any conflict between individuals, such as love stories, should be inserted within its social context,' regretting the fact that characters are too often depicted as 'rootless figures, isolated within an abstract world, who love desire and hate each other as if they were the survivors of a huge cataclysm', 'Un film pour l'après-guerre', *Les Lettres françaises*, n° 15, April 1944. This was the kind of criticism the PCF would direct at him two years later.

⁶ Daquin, *L'Humanité*, n° 62, 27 October 1944.

in *L'Humanité* was limited. *Les Lettres françaises* was originally the journal of the *Comité National des Écrivains* (CNE), which brought together intellectuals who had been actively engaged in the Resistance. While the Communist presence made itself felt in the CNE, the committee was by no means the sole property of the PCF. It included writers of different ideological inclination such as Jean-Paul Sartre, Jean Paulhan, Raymond Queneau, and Gabriel Marcel.⁷ Whereas *L'Humanité* was the official mouthpiece of the PCF, the CNE's *Les Lettres françaises* was more ecumenical, open to a wide range of views reproducing both the wide ideological span of the Resistance movements and the mood of national unity which presided over the first months of the Liberation. Nonetheless the PCF's financial and critical input into *Les Lettres françaises* guaranteed the Party a major influence on the magazine. The pages devoted to film in *Les Lettres françaises* were in the care of the would-be film director Roger Leenhardt and the leading figure of post-war Communist film criticism, Georges Sadoul. Sadoul, who, in the late 1920s, was close to the Surrealists, followed Aragon when the latter broke from Breton's movement and started enunciating the concept of French realism, in the wake of Zhdanov's Socialist Realism.⁸ Sadoul may therefore be seen as the heir and successor of the leading extreme-left film critic of the interwar period, Léon Moussinac. Between 10 March 1944 and 4 July 1945 *Les Lettres françaises* hosted *L'Écran français*, a small clandestine outlet of the Front National's film committee, first published in December 1943. Its first issue appeared on 4 July 1945. Co-financed by the PCF and two Resistance movements, 'Libération' and 'Franc-Tireur', both of which later published their own daily, *L'Écran français* was to top all other French film periodicals in terms of quality, style and openness for the following three years.⁹ Less moralistic in their discourse, the cultural magazines displayed, in the first years that followed the liberation, a more tolerant and open-minded range of opinion. For a couple of years,

⁷ *French Cultural Studies*, ed. by Jill Forbes and Michael Kelly (Oxford: OUP, 1995), p. 102.

⁸ This move will be criticised later by far-Left opponents of the PCF, see chapter 4, p. 157.

⁹ For a comprehensive study of *L'Écran français*, see Olivier Barrot, *L'Écran français, 1943-1953* (Paris: Éditions Francais Réunis, 1979), and Jacques Chevalier, 'Le cinéma et la presse (IX) — *L'Écran français*', *La Revue du cinéma*, n° 352, July-August 1980, pp. 75-85.

these magazines were not actually part of the Party press insofar as their content and editorial line were not controlled and censored by the Party.

Thus Communist film critics could avail of different types of platforms: the official, mainstream press with dailies such as *L'Humanité* and *Ce Soir* ; a cultural press, with a cinema section, targeting a more specialised readership: *Les Lettres françaises* and *Action* ; and a specialised magazine *L'Écran français*. It seems useful to examine now whether the specificity of the different outlets opened to them influenced their writings in any way. Did the card-carrier or fellow-traveller critics speak with one voice or did their judgements and analyses differ according to their 'surroundings'? As we shall see now, Communist criticism in the aftermath of the war was articulated along three main lines: the call for a highly moralistic and patriotic French cinema (*des films sains*), the systematic defence of Russian films and the vilification of American cinema.

2.1.2. We Want 'Healthy' Films

Until the fresh start of French post-war production could be reviewed, the Communist daily was happy to recommend pre-war films, including those of the Communist favourites such as Jean Renoir's *La Marseillaise* and *Les Bas-fonds*, Jean Grémillon's *Le Ciel est à vous* and Jacques Becker's *Goupi-mains-rouges*.¹⁰ Needless to say, the film of the liberation of Paris, *Paris se libère*, also belonged to this list. French films were now reviewed in the light of the defeat of Germany and Vichy. Jean Delannoy's *Pontcarral Colonel d'Empire*, which had been shot and screened during the Occupation, starring Pierre Blanchar, was now shown without cuts and turned into a symbol of Resistance.¹¹ Two days later, while rejecting the pre-war's criticism of *La Marseillaise* as a Communist propaganda film, an anonymous journalist consecrated it as one of the great masterpieces of French cinema and a great French cultural achievement, emphasising the patriotic angle of the film's

¹⁰ *L'Humanité*, n° 53, 17 October 1944.

¹¹ *L'Humanité*, n° 52, 15-16 October 1944.

subject-matter over its revolutionary angle.¹² On the other hand, Renoir's *La Grande Illusion* which had been well received by the French Left in 1937, was subjected to a revisionist examination by Georges Altman, for whom the film's depiction of Franco-German fraternity had now taken an entirely different meaning.¹³ Films were also reviewed in the light of their directors' or writers' war activities. Thus André Cayatte's *Le Dernier Sou*, written by Louis Chavance got a very bad review.¹⁴ Cayatte had worked for Continental and Chavance had written Henri-Georges Clouzot's *Le Corbeau*, which was for the Resistance the worst example of France's defeatism and *the* anti-patriotic film of Vichy France.¹⁵

Sadoul's closeness to Aragon's defence of French national art was apparent in his film criticism. Thus, when Sadoul regreted that René Clair's *I Married a Witch* 'could have been made by anyone', what he was doing was lamenting the fact that Clair had lost his Frenchness.¹⁶ Sadoul did not like Claude Autant-Lara's *Sylvie et le fantôme* which he considered too frivolous and shallow.¹⁷ Yves Allégret's *Les Démons de l'aube* was described as conforming to American taste.¹⁸ The future of French cinema was the first of Sadoul's preoccupations, and in particular the question of the accurate representation of French society.¹⁹

Communist critics were anxious to see French cinema re-establish itself as a cinema of quality and thought that French cinema should show a more frequent interest in the ordinary people of France but should also glorify the country's national heroes.²⁰ During the period

¹² *L'Humanité*, n° 54, 18 October 1944.

¹³ Georges Altman, 'L'eau de rose, la tisane et l'opium d'un film comme *La Grande Illusion*', *L'Écran français*, n° 62, 4 September 1946, p. 5.

¹⁴ 'Le Dernier sou', *Les Lettres françaises*, n° 94, 8 February 1946, p. 7. Cayatte's next film, *Roger la Honte* was also berated by Sadoul, 'Le mort saisit le vif', *Les Lettres françaises*, n° 101, 29 March 1946, p. 7.

¹⁵ See *L'Écran français*, n° 1, décembre 1943 and Georges Adam and Pierre Blanchar, 'Le Corbeau est déplumé', *Les Lettres françaises*, n° 14, March 1944.

¹⁶ Sadoul, 'Un film de René Clair qui pourrait être signé par un autre', *Les Lettres françaises*, n° 31, 25 November 1944, p. 7.

¹⁷ Sadoul, 'languissantes sorcelleries', *Les Lettres françaises*, n° 94, 8 February 1946, p. 7.

¹⁸ Sadoul, 'Dans le goût américain', *Les Lettres françaises*, n° 105, 26 April 1946, p. 7.

¹⁹ Sadoul, 'La quinzaine du cinéma et l'avenir du film français', *Les Lettres françaises*, n° 33, 9 December 1944, p. 7.

²⁰ Robert Durtal, *L'Humanité*, n° 119, 2 January 1945.

under examination, the country's national heroes could only be the Resisters. For instance, Sadoul wondered whether French cinema would be able to tackle the topic of Resistance in any truthful way.²¹ The answer he expected came with *La Bataille du rail*.²²

René Clément's *La Bataille du rail* became the flagship of French cinema.²³ Produced by the CGCF, glorifying the Resistance, stylistically innovative while socially grounded, *La Bataille du rail* possessed all the required qualities to make it the filmic representation of what the PCF hoped for French cinema.²⁴ Indeed, the film industry's political division was evidenced by the absence of both de Gaulle and Malraux at the film's première.²⁵ In *L'Humanité*, it was the first post-war film to receive ecstatic reviews: *La Bataille du rail*, was 'a healthy, lively, popular film and, at the same time, an authentic work of art'.²⁶ Sadoul hailed it as a 'film of our time, at last'.²⁷ *L'Écran français*, naturally sympathetic towards the CGCF closely monitored the making of the film and Jean-Pierre Barrot gave it a good review while pointing to the film's naive Manicheism.²⁸ Minor as it is, this slight criticism was a mark of the openness and diversity of viewpoints which characterised *L'Écran français*. Between 1945 and 1948, views and opinions appeared in this film journal which could not have been found in *L'Humanité* or *Les Lettres françaises*. Writers who

²¹ Sadoul, 'Dans la tradition française', *Les Lettres françaises*, n° 89, January 1946, p. 7.

²² On *La Bataille du rail*, see Jean-Pierre Bertin-Baghit, 'La Bataille du rail, de l'authenticité à la Chanson de geste', *Revue d'histoire moderne et contemporaine*, vol. 33, April-June 1986, pp. 280-300, and Sylvie Lindeperg, *Les Écrans de l'ombre* (Paris: Éditions du CNRS, 1997), pp. 71-86.

²³ Jean-Charles Tachella, 'La Bataille du rail restituera à la Résistance son véritable visage', *L'Écran français*, n° 24, 12 December 1945, pp. 8-9 & 15; Jean-Pierre Barrot, 'Une œuvre authentique poignante comme la vie!', *ibid.*, n° 35, 27 February 1946, p. 7; Jean Queval, 'Entretien avec René Clément', *ibid.*, n° 68, 16 October 1946, pp. 1 & 7; Jean Rougeul, 'Le laborieux déraillement de *La Bataille du rail*', *Les Lettres françaises*, n° 93, 1 February 1946, p. 8; Sadoul, 'Crise des programmes', *ibid.*, n° 96, 22 February 1946, p. 7; Sadoul, 'Le grand prix du cinéma français', *ibid.*, n° 130, 18 October 1946, p. 8; Sadoul, 'L'allusion est-elle légitime', *ibid.*, n° 133, 8 November 1946, p. 8.

²⁴ The CGCF, *Coopérative Générale du Cinéma Français*, was the production branch of the CLCF.

²⁵ 'La Bataille du rail a été gagnée', *L'Écran français*, n° 30, 23 January 1946, p. 3.

²⁶ *L'Humanité*, n° 674, 8 October 1946.

²⁷ Sadoul, 'Enfin un film de notre temps', *Les Lettres françaises*, n° 96, 22 February 1946, p. 7. Later on, Sadoul would compare Clément's film with neorealist productions such as Rossellini's *Rome Open City* and *Païsa*, Sadoul, 'Cinéma italien', *Les Lettres françaises*, n° 134, 15 November 1946, p. 8. If, for Sadoul, *La Bataille du rail* was the portrait of active Resistance, Henri Calef's *Jericho* was portraying those 'who had been waiting in hope as they would have done of a miracle', Sadoul, 'Jéricho', *Les Lettres françaises*, n° 99, 15 March 1946, p. 7.

²⁸ Barrot, pp. 109-111, and Jean-Pierre Barrot, 'Une œuvre authentique, poignante comme la vie', *L'Écran français*, n° 35, 27 February 1946, p. 7.

would later become extremely critical of the PCF and of the latter's positions on film matters, such as Roger Leenhardt, Alexandre Astruc or André Bazin were regular contributors.²⁹ Nevertheless, while independent voices had a say in *L'Écran français*, the magazine defended for the most part the cinema the CLCF, the CGCF or the PCF advocated as well.

2.1.3. For Foreign Films, Look Eastward

Until French film production was operational, there had been an influx of foreign films, mostly American. So much so that on 20 October 1944, film-goers of the French provinces were said to be demanding French films instead of mediocre American films with which 'they were fed up'.³⁰ Yet some of these also received the approval of *L'Humanité*: *Mr Deeds Goes To Town*, *Bluebeard's Eighth Wife*, *Stagecoach* as well as English productions, *Pygmalion*, *Desert Victory*, *Farewell to France*.³¹ In September 1944, *Les Lettres françaises* presented an idyllic view of the relationship between French and American cultures. In what seems to have been a fictional interview, two people, a French woman and an American man, are chatting away about each other's country's film and literature. The American would like to get hold of Éluard's new poems and the French woman says she is anxious to see new American films of which she has heard such good things.³² This cultural love affair would be short-lived, although here as well, *L'Écran français* showed its eclecticism with some writers praising Hollywood productions and others pointing to their shortcomings.³³ For instance the gap between the reality of American society and its representation in Hollywood was studied at length by Georges Magnane.³⁴

²⁹ See for instance Alexandre Astruc, 'Prisonniers du passé', *L'Écran français*, n° 6, 8 August 1945, pp. 6-7; André Bazin, 'Vie et mort de la surimpression, I. A propos de *Ses trois amoureux*', *ibid.*, n° 8, 22 August 1945, pp. 12-13 & 'II. Les fantômes de *Our Town*', n° 9, 29 August 1945, pp. 12-13; 'Entomologie de la pin-up', *ibid.*, n° 77, 17 December 1946, pp. 15-17. See present chapter, pp. 110-117.

³⁰ *L'Humanité*, n° 56, 20 October 1944.

³¹ *L'Humanité*, n° 67, 2 November 1944.

³² Claire Vervin, 'Ce que nous promet le cinéma américain', *Les Lettres françaises*, n° 21, 16 September 1944, p. 7. See also 'Vedettes françaises et américaines à Hollywood', *ibid.*, 23 September 1944, p. 2.

³³ Olivier Barrot stresses that the journal was never very keen on American cinema anyway, p. 57.

³⁴ Georges Magnane, 'Du mensonge d'Hollywood au vrai visage de l'Amérique, I. D'un certain romantisme social', *L'Écran français*, n° 18, 31 October 1945, pp. 3-4; 'Du mensonge d'Hollywood au vrai visage de l'Amérique, II. La comédie des beaux sentiments', *ibid.*, n° 19, 7 November 1945, pp. 8-9 and 14; 'Du

The most obvious Communist bias was unsurprisingly towards Soviet cinema. Writing in *L'Humanité*, Robert Durtal's review of Boris Ivanov and Aleksandr Stolper's *Wait for Me* was prototypical of Cold War, pro-Russian, criticism: 'Watching this wonderful film, one is reminded of Jean Richard-Bloch's words when he declared that Soviet men and women no longer experience that psychological anguish which still weighs so heavily on our minds.' What the critic found so appealing in the film was that it conveyed 'a feeling of healthy joy, of friendship' and vindicated 'marital fidelity and the defence of one's country.'³⁵ In other words: patriotism and high moral standards were a film's mandatory qualities.

If Soviet directors could not go wrong, American directors soon turned into the Communist critics' favourite target. Hollywood films began to be viewed and written about in a way which had little to do with film criticism as such but everything to do with moral edification and an exercise lambasting America. *L'Humanité's* coverage of the 1946 Cannes film festival in October sounded like a trailer for French Communist criticism during the Cold War era. Pol Gaillard wrote of the 'overwhelming superiority' of French and Russian films over American ones, which were 'demeaning and morbid'. In addition to America, Scandinavian films were also castigated as they 'only depicted a society given to rape, drugs, alcohol and prostitution'. To top it all, although he was French, Cocteau only offered a spectacle of 'empty aesthetics and homosexuality'. Fortunately 'the healthy productions of France and the USSR presented the spectators with a more decent choice.'³⁶ The hard feelings which resulted from the Blum-Byrnes agreements may have played a role in this anti-American escalation.

In qualitative terms, the demonisation of Hollywood occurred on moral grounds. Communist criticism was first and foremost concerned with content, leaving little room for any discussion of form and style. Or when it did, it was to criticise its 'intellectualism'. The critical reception of *Citizen Kane* offers a good example of this: *L'Humanité's* reviewer

mensonge d'Hollywood au vrai visage de l'Amérique, III. Femmes amoureuses', *ibid.*, n° 20, 14 November 1945, pp. 3-4.

³⁵ Durtal, *L'Humanité*, n° 237, 17 March 1945.

³⁶ Pol Gaillard, 'La grande leçon de Cannes', *L'Humanité*, n° 682, 16 October 1946.

declared that Orson Welles's first film 'will only appeal to technicians and snobs'.³⁷ Georges Sadoul, in the *Lettres françaises* pursued in the same vein: entitling his article 'hypertrophy of the brain', he considered that the film was 'an encyclopaedia of outmoded techniques, directed by an artless, impetuous and clumsy beginner' and saw no future for it: 'An avant-garde film often ages very quickly and *Citizen Kane*, which was made five years ago, is already beginning to date.'³⁸ It is worth noting that few French critics viewed the film as a masterpiece. While *Le Figaro*'s critic Jean-Jacques Gautier thought it was a real discovery: 'it is not a film but *the* film',³⁹ many other critics were more cautious in their opinions. For instance, André Magnan in *Le Monde*: 'In fact, I would like you [his readers] not to like the film but I still would like you to find it interesting' or Denis Marion in *Combat*: 'The future will tell whether or not the film is a masterpiece'.⁴⁰ On the Left, many critics echoed *L'Humanité*'s criticism of the film's so-called intellectualism. *Libération*'s Jeander wrote that he would be rather surprised 'if the film-buffs of the Champs-Élysées did not rush to see the film in spite of the holidays and hail it as a masterpiece.'⁴¹ For Pierre Lagarde who criticised in *Résistance* the predominant role of the technique in the film: 'Technique should not be a means of expressing oneself. When one uses technique as an end, whatever intellectual gratification one derives from it, one is altering the rules and ruining the essence of the game.'⁴² Louis Duchesne in *Front National* was the most explicit when he wrote that 'everything in the film bore the hallmarks of intellectualism', for him 'The speculations of professional psychologists leave everyone else totally cold'. As can be seen, as far as American films were concerned, if Communist criticism undeniably proved the most unrelenting, it was in 1946 by no means entirely at odds with the rest of the critics.

Communist criticism in the first two years after the Liberation of Paris was articulated around three main ideas: unconditional defence of Soviet cinema, increasing anti-

³⁷ *L'Humanité*, n° 609, 24 July 1946.

³⁸ Sadoul, 'Hypertrophie du cerveau', *Les Lettres françaises*, n° 115, 5 July 1946, p. 7.

³⁹ *Le Figaro*, 10 July 1946.

⁴⁰ *Le Monde*, 9 July 1946; *Combat*, 3 July 1946.

⁴¹ *Libération*, 2 July 1946.

⁴² Pierre Lagarde, 'La technique et l'émotion', *Résistance*, 14-15 July 1946.

Americanism, and defence of a moralistic and patriotic brand of French cinema. Whereas this line was very clear and repeatedly adhered to in the periodicals exclusively controlled by the Party, it was also present in the specialised press, albeit in a more subdued form, rendered less conspicuous because juxtaposed with other opinions to which the Party press was not open.

The quality of a film depended almost entirely on the choice and the treatment of its subject-matter. In the first years following the Liberation, the PCF presented itself as both definer and a guardian of post-war moral values: the PCF was the party of honesty and national pride. Moreover, those highly moralistic values were the only true national values; any depravity and lack of morality could only be either of foreign origins or the work of traitors. As much as anything else, Vichy's France had failed on moral grounds. Pétain's *État français* was a corrupt, unhealthy, depraved organism living out of treachery and dishonesty. Thus the reference to the 'value' of marital fidelity represents a response to the *France de la collaboration* which 'slept with the enemy'. The values of comradeship, healthy behaviour, and patriotism are depicted as the values of the Resistance. Just as the purges were supposed to clean up the film industry, film directors and writers had to go through the same process to deserve the Communist seal of approval. As for the attacks on American cinema, they seem to have taken a sharper turn in the aftermath of the Blum-Byrnes agreements.

As I have shown, the seeds of the type of discourse the PCF would hold for the following eight to ten years had been sown before the war and were already budding at the end of the war. Their full blossoming took place during the Cold War era, to which I would now like to turn my attention.

2.2. Bye Bye Pluralism, Hello Dogmatism

A number of film historians put the PCF's 'conservative' attitude in terms of film criticism and aesthetics down to the Cold War. In fact, between mid-1947 and 1956, what was said and written within the Party press simply intensified and hardened what had been said and written before. Pro-Sovietism and anti-Americanism became extreme to a degree. According to Communist critics, Soviet cinema could not be equalled and was firmly installed at the zenith of world cinema, and French films generally lacked both the high moral standards they ought to promote and the truly national aesthetics all great French works of art had so successfully achieved, according to the Party. Before looking at these criticisms more closely, it is necessary to mention the changes that occurred within the Party-controlled periodicals during the period under examination.

While the official Party press — *L'Humanité*, *L'Humanité Dimanche* (launched on 3 October 1948), *France Nouvelle* — readily spread the new party line that emerged following the setting up of the Cominform in Poland, a change of tone could be felt in the magazines the Party partly controlled. The editorial line of the two periodicals which had been the symbols of the unified, albeit fragile, front presented by the Resistance in the first three post-war years started adopting the Party's increasingly narrow positions. In June 1948, *L'Écran français* had to come closer to *Les Lettres françaises* due to financial difficulties. This move was followed by the departure of two of the original editors, Jean Vidal and Jean-Pierre Barrot, leaving René Blech as sole managing-editor of the magazine. In falling into the Party's fold, the differences between *L'Écran français*'s criticism and that of *Les Lettres françaises* disappeared. Georges Sadoul, in spite of his great renown as film historian, followed the Party's line as he had followed Aragon when the latter broke from the Surrealists. As the Cold War grew steadily more acrimonious, Communist criticism followed suit. When Roger Boussinot took over *L'Écran français* on 6 March 1950, he had an implicit mandate to turn it into a propaganda tool. This led to a fall in the periodical's

readership.⁴³ It should be said firstly that what had been *the* film magazine at the Liberation had begun to face prestigious competition from publications such as Jean George Auriol's *La Revue du cinéma*, followed in April 1951 by André Bazin, Lo Duca and Jacques Doniol-Valcroze's *Cahiers du cinéma*. Some of *L'Écran français*'s best names had already begun sending their best papers to other outlets, which led to a drop in the magazine's editorial quality. In March 1952, *L'Écran français* was absorbed into *Les Lettres françaises* in the form of a few centre pages and eventually disappeared altogether after 12 February 1953 issue of the Communist cultural weekly. Consequently, by the end of 1948, every single Party outlet was engaged in the dialectics of the Cold War. Day after day, the large scale castigation of the United States made front page and centre-spread headlines.

2.2.1. America as the Mother of All Evils

Only days after the PCF's delegates who attended the formation of the Cominform in Poland in September 1947 had returned to France, the anti-American campaign was launched. As well as the rekindling of the campaign for the defence of French cinema (i.e. the campaign against the Blum-Byrnes agreement), the PCF embarked on a long and devastating campaign against American films, the bitterness and viciousness of which would never be equalled. From 1947 until well into the mid 1950s, ninety-nine percent of Hollywood films were deemed poisonous, obscene, stupid, prudish and demeaning. It was as if the critics who published in the Communist press vied with each other in finding the most abusive terms for Hollywood productions. A month after the formation of the Cominform, the turn taken by the PCF appeared in all its blatant sectarianism in a mix of economy, ideology and morals:

America debases the spirit
Gangsters and pin-up girls... neurotics and puritans,
this is the cinema of the trusts...⁴⁴

⁴³ A similar phenomenon happened to *Cahiers du cinéma* in the early 1970s when they went down the Maoist dogmatic road, see chapter 6, p. 261.

⁴⁴ Guy Leclerc, *L'Humanité*, n° 972, 24 October 1947, p. 8.

Such headlines were repeated ad nauseam over the next few years. It would be tiresome to list them all, although some of them were quite amusing such as, for instance, when Georges Sadoul reviewed Walt Disney's *Alice in Wonderland*: 'When the film ends, one should look around the cinema. Parents yawn, and the children look dazed as if in the aftermath of a huge catastrophe. The film seems to have lasted six hours instead of one. [...] From time to time, someone sniggers amidst dead silence, then ashamed to be the only one, falls suddenly quiet.'⁴⁵

On a more serious note, this excerpt was the beginning of a long article entitled 'Hollywood's decadence'. Every single aspect of Hollywood films is denigrated: Mickey Mouse is 'an ugly, hairy rat', Walt Disney's creatures are 'wiggling about to a swing-like rhythm', Georges Sadoul utterly rejects John Huston's *The Asphalt Jungle*, Elia Kazan's *Panic in the Streets*, Jules Dassin's *Night and the City* and Billy Wilder's *Sunset Boulevard*, lumping together 'westerns, musicals, gangsters, cow-boys, pin-ups, silly musicals, Technicolor films, "detective films" (*film noir*), spy films, psychoanalytical films, and Biblical mascarades'. Only Mankiewicz's *A Letter to Three Wives* and *All about Eve*, which he finds more lucid, Fred Zinnemann's *The Men* and Clarence Brown's *Intruder in the Dust*, 'the best American film of 1951', escape Sadoul's hatchet. The Communist critic reproaches Hollywood for its 'constant apology of murder' and its 'systematic culture of despair' and, in the wake of the American intervention in Korea, its 'apologia for war'.

Psychoanalysis was seen as one of Hollywood's most dangerous weapons. It was at the time considered a 'reactionary ideology'. According to the PCF, the United States developed psychoanalysis as a means of social control and oppression. This charge was especially levelled against Hollywood which chose psychoanalysis as one of its main sources of inspiration. The PCF's condemnation of the talking cure became official in June 1949, through an article signed by eight Communist psychiatrists who published a self-criticism in *La Nouvelle Critique*.⁴⁶ This important article, which was to define the Party's attitude

⁴⁵ Sadoul, 'Décadence d'Hollywood', *Les Lettres françaises*, n° 395, 3 January 1952, p. 6.

⁴⁶ See Dr Lucien Bonnafé, Médecin des Hôpitaux psychiatriques de la Seine; Dr Sven Follin, Médecin des Hôpitaux psychiatriques de la Seine; Dr Jean Kestemberg, Dr Évelyne Kestemberg, Psychothérapeute à l'Hôpital Henri Roussel, Dr Serge Lebovici, Médecin Assistant des Hôpitaux de Paris; Dr Louis Le Guillant,

towards psychoanalysis for the next twenty-five years contained a detailed indictment of psychoanalysis. In the introductory paragraphs, American films are clearly attacked: 'There is a particular press, a particular kind of film which cultivates the snob value of psychoanalysis.' Defined as a 'mystifying doctrine', the birth of psychoanalysis 'is specifically linked to the needs of a social class', i.e. the bourgeoisie and the 'area where its influence is most felt has been confined to the Western English-speaking world' but 'if it is becoming more and more popular and widespread, it is as a symptom of a crisis which is growing in direct proportion to the decline of the regime under which it was born.' The terrible reviews which greeted American films — such as most of Hitchcock's work of the 1950s' — in the Communist-led press would often be based on an attack on their psychoanalytical content. In January 1950, *L'Écran français* published an article signed by Dr Sven Follin, one of the eight psychiatrists, entitled 'American cinema uses psychiatry as a means of propaganda'. For Sven Follin, 'with films imported from the USA or inspired by them, the falsification consists in stating that one's moral, social or material difficulties boil down to psychological or even psycho-pathological troubles. Moreover they tend to put forward psychoanalysis as the universal answer.' In contrast to American films, the psychiatrist sets both Soviet cinema and Louis Daquin's *Le Point du jour* as good examples for 'while they do not avoid psychological considerations, they put them within the overall context of social struggle.'⁴⁷

Psychoanalysis, war-mongering, pornography made up a rather indigestible cocktail of evils propagated by American cinema, according to Communist critics. Behind the superficiality and sectarianism of the Communist treatment of Hollywood cinema, lie real motives which have little to do with aesthetics and everything to do with politics. For instance, the Communist critics' attitude towards American directors, actors and actresses depended for a large part on the latter's attitude before the House Committee of Un-American

Médecin des Hôpitaux psychiatriques de la Seine; Dr Monnerot, Interne des Hôpitaux psychiatriques de la Seine; S. Shentoub, Attaché de Recherches au CNRS, 'Autocritique: La psychanalyse, idéologie réactionnaire', *La Nouvelle Critique*, n° 7, June 1949, pp. 57-72.

⁴⁷ Riou Rouvet, 'Le cinéma est-il coupable d'exercice illégal de la médecine mentale? (7) Dr Sven Follin. "Le cinéma américain se sert de la psychiatrie comme instrument de propagande", *L'Écran français*, n° 236, 9 January 1950, p. 6.

Activities (CUAA). Those who named became the plague of American cinema, those who resisted or were persecuted became heroes of the people and usually their films were better received. Katharine Hepburn who protested against McCarthy's ultra-conservative campaign managed to make *L'Humanité's* front-page.⁴⁸ Yet, the Party's real champion was Charlie Chaplin who reached near cult status. In 1952, a visit by Charlie Chaplin to France received widespread coverage in the Communist press which saluted 'Charlie Chaplin's artist soul and heart full of goodness'.⁴⁹ That the PCF found in Charlie Chaplin a 'good' American should not come as a surprise. The director's difficulties with the CUAA was in itself enough to gain him sympathy from the French Communists. Indeed it was more Chaplin's criticism of the United States than his own films that made him so popular with the Party. His post-war films were not praised without misgivings: Guy Leclerc considered that Mr Verdoux's individual revolt was too pessimistic and defeatist.⁵⁰ Discussing *City Lights*, Sadoul wrote that in his film Chaplin 'was akin to some German intellectuals when Hitler was coming to power. His great bitterness must be understood even if we do not approve of it'.⁵¹ It must also be said that Sadoul as a film historian was a great admirer of Charlie Chaplin's early and pre-war production.⁵² Nevertheless the close relationship between Chaplin and France and its film industry did seal the love affair between the PCF and Chaplin. In April 1952, he sent an open letter to *Les Lettres françaises*:

Greetings to France,
Civilised people of every nation have a debt towards France, for her spirit of liberty, her intelligence, her art.

Since France is acknowledged to be a second motherland, we must all the more so pay homage to French cinematic art and its creators. My affection towards France is particularly strong because I have French blood in my veins. I learned a great deal from the masters of film comedy such as Max Linder, France's pioneer of comic cinema.

For this reason the long and lasting crisis of the French film industry affects me and causes me deep sadness and sorrow. French cinematic art must keep its integrity and

⁴⁸ *L'Humanité*, n° 1203, 20 July 1948.

⁴⁹ Sadoul, 'Welcome Charlie Chaplin', *L'Humanité Dimanche*, n° 207, 26 October 1952; 'Charlot arrives at Orly tomorrow at 4 p.m.', *L'Humanité*, n° 2534, 28 October 1952; *ibid.*, n° 2537, 31 October 1952.

⁵⁰ *L'Humanité*, n° 1046, 18-19 June 1950.

⁵¹ Sadoul, 'Reconnaissance à Charlot', *Les Lettres françaises*, n° 336, 9 November 1950, p. 6.

⁵² Sadoul published a biography of Charlie Chaplin in 1952: *Vie de Charlot* (Paris: Éditeurs Français Réunis, 1952); 2nd edition, 1957; latest edition, *Vie de Charlot* (Paris: Pierre Lherminier Éditeur/Filméditations, 1978).

vitality. French people must save it. It is their duty towards themselves, their artists and their workers.

It is also their duty towards the entire world. I am convinced that they shall fulfil it. Their courageous intelligence has helped them to resolve crises before where justice and liberty were at stake.

I would not know myself what specific measures are required to alleviate the difficulties which are forcing the French film industry to limit its production. Yet, I am convinced that such measures need to be put in place with the help of the French people. I would like to see an immediate reduction in the number of bad foreign films ruthlessly competing in the market.

Here, in Hollywood, difficulties are beginning to be felt among the film companies which produce bad films like a machine produces sausages. Over the past five years, the cost of film production has tripled. On top of this, one must add the increasing competition of television. Very soon, millions of Americans will stop spending their money on all these mediocre and repetitive films. I think there will be fewer and fewer of these films.

May French film makers, with the help of the French people, remain faithful to the principles of artistic courage and integrity which have earned them the prestigious position which they occupy in the world. I salute the renaissance of French cinema. Charlie Chaplin, Hollywood, 21 March 1952.⁵³

While Hollywood was portrayed as a fiendish place, Soviet productions were the *crème de la crème*. Indeed the productions of the post-war USSR were deemed to be equal and often superior in quality to those of the 1920s; thus Georges Sadoul wrote that between 1946 and 1951, USSR produced 'more masterpieces than at the time of *The Mother* or *Battleship Potemkin*. The flowering of its cinema surpassed anything done before'.⁵⁴ *The Cavalier of the Golden Star* was deemed 'the most beautiful film shown in Paris'.⁵⁵ Pudovkin's *Admiral Nakhimov* was 'a great epic fresco which was a credit to world cinema'.⁵⁶ *The Battle of Stalingrad* and *The Stone Flower* received rave reviews and Jean-Pierre Chabrol rejoiced in 'the never-ending elevation of Soviet cinema — from *Battleship Potemkin* to *The Young Guard*'.⁵⁷

There are few examples of pro-Sovietism in the French fiction films of the period. One of the miners in Daquin's *Le Point du jour* wants to go back to his native Poland where 'life is

⁵³ 'Un article exclusif de Charlie Chaplin', *Les Lettres françaises*, n° 408, 3-10 April 1952, pp. 1 & 12.

⁵⁴ Sadoul, 'Derniers regards sur le cinéma mondial de 1950-1951', *Les Lettres françaises*, n° 396, 10 January 1952, p. 6.

⁵⁵ *L'Humanité*, n° 2633, 21 February 1953.

⁵⁶ Monjo, *L'Humanité*, n° 1075, 20 February 1948.

⁵⁷ Jean-Pierre Chabrol, *L'Humanité*, n° 1361, 20 January 1949.

better now'. More explicit, was the documentary *Horizons* made for the CGT Congress in 1952. Here is an example of the dialogue:

— Look at how they eat in the factory.

— What factory ?

[An issue of *La Vie Ouvrière* is open, the title reads: 'A visit of the CGT delegation to the USSR']

— A factory in Stalingrad. Over there, workers don't live on thin air. They live like men, you see. The people who work live in real houses, not in barracks, take my word for it. You wouldn't believe how much the kids over there are happy. If only you could see them in the gardens, the schools, the crèches, a life like this for our kids. Everyone studies, reads. Over there those who do everything have everything, here those who do everything have nothing. Sure, that what it's like over there of course, but here too it's possible, like in 1936.⁵⁸

Such an overtly pro-Soviet stance was limited to propaganda films. As has been seen in the previous chapter, Communist propaganda films were shown through an independent network controlled by the Party and its satellite organisations. As Patricia Hubert-Lacombe points out, in spite of the numerous anti-American campaigns in the film industry and the PCF's influence in the film trade, there are hardly any occurrences of anti-Americanism or pro-Americanism in the French fiction films produced during the Cold War era: 'The representation of each enemy is not black and white. It would indeed be tempting to look for — and, for that matter, find — a certain number of films taking a pro-American stance and a similar number of films conveying anti-American feeling. This would be the result of a black and white viewpoint. If you were to follow such an approach the result would be disappointing anyway: there is nothing there.'⁵⁹

In literature and the plastic arts, on the contrary, there were many more instances of such anti-'Yankee' positions. The Party's activities in the sphere of literature were well organised — let us not forget that Aragon was not only the Party's main cultural activist but also one of its most influential members. It owned its own publishing houses and organised a network of Communist book fairs throughout the country. Thus 'Party-sponsored publications were assured of a captive audience, distribution and sales. The Party promoted its authors and

⁵⁸ *Horizons*, a film produced by the CGT in 1952.

⁵⁹ Patricia Hubert-Lacombe, 'Ni coca-cola, ni vodka', *Focales*, Presses Universitaires de Nancy, 1993, pp. 45-51.

called upon the *esprit de parti* in an effort to sell their works.’⁶⁰ Such an author was André Stil, editor in chief of the Party’s daily *L’Humanité*, who in 1952, was awarded the Stalin prize for his novel *Le Premier Choc*. Anti-Americanism is one of the key topics of the novel as the following excerpt makes clear: ‘So, it doesn’t bother you, Dupuy, what the Americans are doing over there: to the women, children, the old people, with their napalm bombs. And what about the comrades they are shooting? They are worse than the Krauts.’⁶¹ Communist novelists could wallow in their anti-American feelings and reached a readership already dedicated to the cause. Communist film auteurs and directors did not have the same opportunity. Fiction films were expensive to produce and the commercial distribution networks were not made available to them. Their anti-Americanism and pro-Russian feelings were limited therefore to other channels of communication.

The anti-American criticisms were left to the critics. Hollywood cinema was condemned for its baseness. However excessive this may appear today, there was a certain logic in this. As Stil wrote, Americans ‘were worse than the Krauts’, they had replaced the Germans as the enemy. Germany had turned France into a morally unhealthy country, now it was the USA which was trying to do the same. The argument actually smacks of the discourse in use during the pre-Resistance/Russo-German pact period when the PCF denounced the war as a capitalist one. After WW2 the USA had simply replaced Nazi Germany as the main capitalist evil, and the arguments used against Germany were recycled against America. The campaigns against Hollywood, which the Party orchestrated to a certain degree, were manned by a great proportion of the film industry’s workforce. This support was limited to economic, industrial and social considerations and the trade’s anti-Americanism never affected the films themselves. Let us now examine whether or not the PCF’s advised aesthetics for French cinema found a more favourable response among the country’s directors.

⁶⁰ Irwin M. Wall. *French Communism in the Era of Stalin* (Westport: Connecticut, 1983), p. 129.

⁶¹ André Stil, *Le Premier Choc* (Paris: Éditions Français Réunis, 1952), p. 97.

2.2.2. French Cinema and ‘*le Nouveau Réalisme*’

Communist film criticism of French cinema during the Cold War period followed the same black and white approach it adopted towards American and Soviet cinemas. In theory, in order to deserve the Communist seal of approval a film had to conform to the two pillars of Cold War French Communist aesthetics: New Realism and national aesthetics.

The *Nouveau Réalisme* can be best defined as the French brand of Zhdanovism, i.e. as French Socialist Realism. Among a number of addresses made by the Party leaders to its intellectuals, Laurent Casanova’s *Responsabilité de l’intellectuel Communiste* was certainly the most clearly spelt-out set of rules for New Realism.

The responsibilities of a Communist intellectual

Recommendations of the *Comité Central*:

- To take up all the ideological and political positions of the working class.
- To defend with the strongest resolution all the Party’s positions, whatever the circumstances.
- To protect ourselves from complacency.
- To cultivate in ourselves the love of the Party, in its most conscious form: *l’esprit de parti*.
- To give the working class new reasons and new justifications by creating more convincing works.⁶²

L’esprit de parti, an expression borrowed from Stalin’s USSR, meant that the validity of the Party’s positions could not be questioned. In other words, to cultivate *l’esprit de parti* amounted to forsaking one’s freedom of judgement in view of the fact that the Party was always right. Hence Casanova’s complaint that ‘there is always something quite ridiculous in the way some comrades enjoin the Party to explain itself.’⁶³ For the artists, *l’esprit de parti* resulted in the full endorsement of the rules of Zhdanov’s Socialist Realism. Communist artists were asked rather insistently to apply these guidelines. In what appears today almost like a Freudian slip but was actually a very deliberate statement, Casanova complains that

⁶² Laurent Casanova, *Responsabilité de l’intellectuel communiste* (Paris: La Nouvelle Critique, 1949), pp. 30-31.

⁶³ Ibid., p. 30.

‘there are still some Communists who are incredibly wooden when they come to deal with this living, breathing entity that is the struggling working class’.⁶⁴

As Irwin M. Wall underlines, ‘It is difficult today to understand the frenzy with which the PCF’s intellectuals embraced the phenomenon of Zhdanovism from 1947 to 1954.’⁶⁵ Socialist Realism came to encompass almost every art form. Communist literature, as in the case of André Stil’s *Le Premier Choc* complied with the rules of socialist realism. In painting, André Fougeron eclipsed Picasso or Léger as the Party’s favoured painter. As far as cinema is concerned, Louis Daquin was one of the few Communist directors to have received public praise from the PCF leadership for his film *Le Point du jour*, which I shall discuss later.⁶⁶

But what did New Realism mean in terms of film art? Irwin M. Wall writes that in socialist realism ‘plots must be objectively set in an historical context and demonstrate plausible characters acting in authentic situations’, and that ‘Socialist Realism promised to bring together elite and popular culture, simplify high culture to render it comprehensible to the masses’.⁶⁷ In real terms this meant, on the one hand, a condemnation of formalism, implying the predominance of the subject-matter over style; and, on the other hand, a total rejection of intellectualism. To this the PCF added its own cultural nationalism.

In the PCF’s Cold War discourse on cultural policy, New Realism was closely associated with a nationalist perspective. Not only was it perfectly integrated in the French cultural and aesthetic tradition, but New Realism was presented as the only truly national aesthetics. When Aragon resuscitated his 1937 speech in the May 1949 issue of *La Nouvelle Critique*, he underlined in the introduction the similarities between his pre-war and contemporary positions.⁶⁸ These similarities, he writes, stress ‘the continuity of the PCF’s national policy.’ For the Communist writer, ‘the theoretical solutions the questions of culture have received in the USSR are such that they include both Soviet and French realities, while allowing for their

⁶⁴ ‘Il y a encore trop de Communistes dont les mains restent de bois lorsqu’ils les appliquent à cette matière vivante et chaude qu’est le prolétariat en lutte’, *ibid.*, p. 30.

⁶⁵ Wall, p. 128.

⁶⁶ Casanova, pp. 23-24.

⁶⁷ *Ibid.*, pp. 128-129.

⁶⁸ Aragon, ‘Réalisme socialiste et réalisme français’, *La Nouvelle Critique*, n° 6, May 1949, pp. 27-39.

differences.’ He then embarks on a long analysis of the historical development of French culture. His positions are extremely nationalistic, often bordering on cultural xenophobia. ‘The Italian Renaissance’, he writes, ‘interrupted the natural series of French creations of a Realist, truly French art (*La Renaissance italienne vient interrompre la suite naturelle des découvertes françaises d’un art réaliste et proprement français*). A few pages later, he addresses the issue of French painting in the aftermath of the French Revolution: ‘the Republican executioner’s drum had not resounded yet, but in French painting national pride came to the fore and was *a call to arms against foreign taste*, taking on a strength which went back to the Middle Ages’ and Chateaubriand’s art is described as ‘*émigré art*’ (my emphasis).⁶⁹ He even denies the Frenchness of Picasso: ‘the future will remember that Picasso was a great Spanish painter, whether he likes it or not.’ Aragon drives the point home when he declares ‘Every time you turn away from reality, you turn away from France.’ The Stalinist logic of such views appear clearly now. If one’s artistic expression did not follow the precepts of New Realism, then one’s art was anti-national, i.e. in the pay of the enemy, the Americans. Throughout the Cold War era, the PCF’s appropriation of France’s cultural heritage came into view when the ravages of American cultural colonialism were exposed:

The coalition of the contemptible.

The great and virile French people today defend their independence: they will succeed!

The country of Rabelais, of Molière is condemned to the shoddiness of American civilisation.

In our cinema, American films, or rather the refuse from American cinema, are shown: gangsters, dollars, kisses. Detective novels are piling up in our libraries. The country of Rabelais, Molière, Balzac, Flaubert and Zola is condemned to the ersatz civilisation which is mass-produced in America.⁷⁰

When Maurice Thorez attacked American culture, he did so by opposing it not only to New Realism but to France’s cultural tradition:

American films, which invade our screens thanks to Léon Blum, not only take the bread from our artists, musicians, workers and technicians in our studios. They literally poison the minds of our children, of our young men and young women, whom

⁶⁹ ‘*Le tambour de Santerre n’a pas encore battu [...]*’; Antoine Joseph Santerre led Louis XVI to the guillotine.

⁷⁰ Ilya Erhenbourg, ‘La Coalition des méprisables’, *France Nouvelle*, 3 January 1948, pp. 6-7.

they are trying to turn into docile slaves of American millionaires instead of French people attached to the moral and cultural values which have made up the grandeur and glory of our country.⁷¹

As to the reception of French film, the entire critical discourse was based on anti-intellectualism, anti-formalism and nationalism. This applies to almost every film reviewed during those years. An investigation of a few symptomatic examples will provide a sufficiently clear idea of the functioning and reasoning of the PCF's critics. By looking closely at both the Communist and the other critics' reviews which greeted two French films, *Antoine et Antoinette* in 1947 and *Le Point du jour* in 1949, the excesses, limitations and contradictions of many a Communist position will be made apparent. In particular, it will be seen that, contrary to what could have been expected, given the polarisation of France's politics at the time, Communist criticism was not in itself totally at odds with the rest of the critical spectrum. Indeed, I shall show that, in the midst of the Cold War, a surprising community of mind existed between a PCF which, according to Laurent Casanova, 'lived in an hostile, ferociously hostile, world' and 'was immersed in the struggle, under pressure from all quarters' and its political opponents.⁷²

2.2.3. *Antoine et Antoinette* and *Le Point du jour*

Jacques Becker's *Antoine and Antoinette*, which was presented at the second Festival de Cannes in 1947, offers a perfect insight into the way Communist film criticism operated. *L'Humanité*'s reviewer managed to both show his admiration of the film and launch a bitter attack on Sartre and the existentialists, who, for some years, were the Party's favourite target along with psychoanalysts:

A masterpiece: the daily life of a young Parisian couple, he is a young printer, she works as a shop-assistant in a chain store. There are no abstractions, no pseudo-philosophical Sartrean concepts, still less an angst-ridden interrogation of life, none of that! Simply Life itself, faithfully portrayed with its painful moments, its

⁷¹ *L'Humanité*, 19 April 1948.

⁷² Casanova, p. 4.

disappointments but also with its joys and its hopes. The best of cinema: truth, movement, feelings, optimism. Away with angst addicts, long live life!⁷³

The film's positive and tender look at a working-class couple was bound to appeal to Communist critics. The film encapsulated the essence of New Realism: the life of ordinary members of the working class depicted simply, with feeling and optimism. In 1949, Louis Daquin would refer to *Antoine et Antoinette* as one of the precursors of New Realism and the inspiration for *Le Point du jour*. Guy Leclerc's review was also prototypical of the Party's anti-intellectualism for years to come, as well as of the PCF's complete dismissal of existentialism. The ferocity, of Communist attacks, bordering on hysteria, never seems so sharp as when addressed at those who have been close to it, as Sartre had been at the end of the war — and would be again a few years later. At the time, in France, Sartre was *the* villain: 'When Sartre succeeds Mussolini' read *L'Écran français*'s front page.⁷⁴ The review of Jean Delannoy's *Les Jeux sont faits*, also selected at the 1947 Cannes Film Festival, eloquently displayed the reviewer's thoughtful analysis of the film:

The philosopher of nothingness. [...] Besides, his theories of pessimistic individualism and defeat seem rather out of place in the *Palais du Festival* which symbolises the collective enthusiasm of our workers as well as their happiness at their achievement [...]. He has tried to make his daily nausea contagious and to spread the sickening miasma which springs from his mind.⁷⁵

During the Congress of Intellectuals for Peace which took place in Wroclaw in August 1948, the Soviet writer Fadeiev declared: 'If jackals knew how to type and hyenas how to use a pen, they would write like Henry Miller, Eliot, Malraux and Sartre',⁷⁶ echoing in the

⁷³ Guy Leclerc, 'Triomphe français à Cannes avec le dernier film de Jacques Becker, *Antoine et Antoinette*', *L'Humanité*, 21-22 September 1947.

⁷⁴ *L'Écran français*, n° 309, 6-12 June 1951, p. 1 & Le Minotaure, 'Comme on se retrouve! M. Fernand Rivers, Jean-Paul Sartre, Benito Mussolini... et *Les Mains sales*', *ibid.*, p. 3.

⁷⁵ Guy Leclerc, '*Les Jeux sont faits* et M. Sartre a perdu', *L'Humanité*, 19 September 1947. There had been difficulties in organising the second Cannes Film Festival but, thanks to the Communist town councillors, the Festival eventually took place, but without governmental subsidies. See *L'Humanité*, n° 933, 9 September 1947.

⁷⁶ A. Fadeiev, 'L'ignorantisme, le culte de la bestialité contre la culture et la liberté humaines servent les buts expansionnistes des impérialistes américains', *France Nouvelle*, n° 143, 11 September 1948, p. 10.

violence of the attack Carl Radek's definition of James Joyce's work as a 'dunghill crawling with vermin filmed through a microscope' in Moscow in 1934.⁷⁷ It was essential for Communists to conflate French and American writers, in order to justify discarding them as writers unfit to deserve national recognition.⁷⁸

The PCF's critics might have been the only ones to drag Sartre's name and Delannoy's film in the mud but they were not the only ones to praise *Antoine et Antoinette* to the skies. Anti-intellectualism transgressed political divisions. The reviews of the two main Right-wing dailies strikingly echoed that of *L'Humanité*. In *L'Aurore*, the critic praised 'the truthfulness of the film', adding that the film 'was about the fundamentally simple life of the Parisian people, despite the complexity of their everyday worries.' 'The accuracy of the portrait', he wrote, 'the restraint, the kind of charming reserve as well as the real gaiety and kindly humour of the dialogues could not be commended enough.'⁷⁹ Jean-Jacques Gautier for *Le Figaro* took a similar view: 'At last a good, an excellent, a remarkable film. At last real cinema and cinema at its best.' Moreover, following Guy Leclerc's example, albeit less virulently, he attacked intellectualism: 'Despite all that could be said about the populism and naturalism of *Antoine et Antoinette* and the visible distaste of Mr Becker's colleagues and of the young 'abstractionists' (*les abstracteurs de quintessence*), the film remains a very good one.'⁸⁰ Françoise Giroud, one of *Antoine et Antoinette*'s writers, declared two weeks later in an interview with Paul Carrière that 'it didn't convince anybody to be original at any cost or to invent the most extravagant situations', adding that this 'only appealed to snobs'. She went on to state that she thought personally that film-makers were now 'too cerebral, as if they tried to lose their humanity. As if they had forgotten that the metro

⁷⁷ *Les Hôtes de Staline*, broadcast on the Franco-German cultural TV channel Arte on 11 April 1996.

⁷⁸ As a point of illustration and comparison, this is how *En attendant Godot* was reviewed in *L'Humanité* in 1953: "'Don't wait for Godot'". Characters who vaguely remind one of mad and amnesiac tramps who, for two hours, converse in a somewhat incoherent and often obscene way. This is the degrading image of humanity that Samuel Beckett wants to subject us to in *En attendant Godot*. It is as boring as it is disgusting and is a good reminder of the moral and intellectual level of the French bourgeoisie today. This is the bourgeoisie which praises the play to the skies in its press and on its airwaves', *L'Humanité*, n° 2598, 12 January 1953.

⁷⁹ 'After the triumph of *Les Maudits* and the great success of *Les Jeux sont faits*, a third French film has just achieved the most unanimous and deserved success', *L'Aurore*, n° 937, 21-22 September 1947.

⁸⁰ *Le Figaro*, n° 940, 21-22 September 1947.

existed.’⁸¹ Even the strongly anti-Communist weekly, *Carrefour* joined in the concert of congratulations. François Chalais saw *Antoine et Antoinette* as a ‘masterpiece of equilibrium’, and when he added that ‘this was very much part of the French classical tradition, where, as we had known for some time already, Mr Jacques Becker was very much at home’, he echoed the Communist endorsement of Jacques Becker as a film director with a truly French style.⁸²

Whereas in 1947, the Cold War was still at its preliminary stage, by 1949 the polarisation of the world’s and France’s politics was complete. Louis Daquin’s membership of the Party was very much in the public eye and he was himself a keen party activist. The Party critics presented his new film, *Le Point du jour*, as the perfect filmic example of New Realism.⁸³ For Georges Sadoul, *Le Point du jour* demonstrated that ‘when you make a real change in the social background, the subject-matter also changes, as do the way the actors act, the style, the dramatic conception, the editing and the photography. In this way, the experience of making the film is akin to Italian productions and places it in the avant-garde of contemporary cinema.’⁸⁴ Yet, the same critical consensus which had so positively greeted *Antoine et Antoinette*, was repeated vis-à-vis Louis Daquin’s *Le Point du jour*. The overall unanimity of French critics raises a few questions. Particularly interesting and revealing was the way the PCF responded to such an extraordinary unity of mind given the political circumstances.

Obviously the director’s political inclinations were pin-pointed — and criticised — by several journalists, but they all agreed that the film was a faithful, accurate and often moving and lyrical depiction of the hardships of the miners. *Le Monde*’s André Magnan, after voicing his fears that the director’s well-publicised political views might have affected the film, concluded that ‘if some social arguments come to the surface, it is unavoidable, there

⁸¹ *Le Figaro*, n° 952, 5-6 October 1947.

⁸² *Carrefour*, n° 164, 5 November 1947. In the same issue, the front page read ‘In France, in Italy, in the Balkans, the Cominform is busy setting up its war operation.’

⁸³ Hubert-Lacombe describes the film as ‘the only example of Stalinist fiction film in France’, ‘Ni coca-cola, ni vodka’, pp. 45-51.

⁸⁴ *Les Lettres françaises*, 19 May 1949.

can be no other way' and considered *Le Point du jour* to be 'a good film'.⁸⁵ *Libération* praised the realism of the film and the everyday reality of its storyline: 'no firedamp explosion, no fire, no flooding. An unbiased film which makes no concessions'.⁸⁶ André Bazin, in *Le Parisien Libéré*, considered that 'never before had cinema understood the mine and miners so well.'⁸⁷ Jean Mervil for *La Croix* acknowledged the film's truthfulness, maintained that 'the Communist ideology which presided over the making of the film had considerably altered its objectivity', but nevertheless concluded somewhat paradoxically that 'Mr Daquin had been accurate in what was felt, seen and played.'⁸⁸ While Jean Morienvall for *L'Aube* described the film as 'remarkable in spite of its political slant and as Daquin's best work so far', René Lehman for *France-Hebdo* did not detect 'any political preaching in an absolute success'.⁸⁹ *L'Aurore*, through the voice of Claude Lazurick, acknowledged that 'when Daquin deals with the miners' world, he does so with love, with passion. Northern France is his territory, and he does not want it to be a foreign country for us', concluding that 'although *Le Point du jour* is not an enthralling film, we have to applaud such a well made piece of work'.⁹⁰ Louis Chauvet for *Le Figaro* also praised Daquin's 'well done job'.⁹¹ Jeander for *Libération* poked fun at some of his colleagues who, he wrote, 'thought that some of the characters were 'tendentious', or might even be Communists.' Jeander signalled that 'if Daquin had chosen to show only Force Ouvrière's or CFTC's miners, he would have wondered whether he was not being taken for a complete imbecile.'⁹²

As can be seen, the reviews went from lukewarm to ecstatic acclaim for *Le Point du jour*. For the PCF critics, this was a real godsend and they made the most of it. All they needed to claim victory was Claude Mauriac's review of Daquin's film in *Le Figaro littéraire*.

⁸⁵ *Le Monde*, 26 May 1949.

⁸⁶ *Libération*, 8 April 1949.

⁸⁷ *Le Parisien Libéré*, 29 May 1949.

⁸⁸ *La Croix*, 2 June 1949.

⁸⁹ *L'Aube*, 23 May 1949; *France-Hebdo*, 31 May 1949.

⁹⁰ *L'Aurore*, 20 May 1949.

⁹¹ *Le Figaro*, 23 May 1949.

⁹² *Libération*, 23 May 1949.

Mauriac was particularly positive about the film only weeks after having taken Sadoul and Daquin to task for the positions they had adopted in a debate in *La Nouvelle Critique*.

The latter was another presentation of New Realism with particular emphasis on the predominant role of the subject-matter. According to Louis Daquin, 'the French school of cinema, consciously or unconsciously, took the line of being avant-garde in its choice of subject, with a depth which had nothing to do with the depth of the lens, and in the elaboration of a style characterised by youthfulness, sensitivity, humanity and a concern for truth, rather than systematically looking for the way film-sets were built up'.⁹³ Sadoul takes up Daquin's point, and underlines the fact that the emphasis on the subject-matter has always been a French trait: 'This was the French school which around 1935, gave back to French cinema the supremacy it had lost. It did so through the works of Renoir, Feyder, Carné, Grémillon, who built on their own previous successes as well as on the works of René Clair and Jean Vigo. And it was by virtue of the subject-matter that these directors created a new style. Those who saved French cinema, Clair and Feyder, turned to our cultural heritage, from Labiche to Zola, and also to the appeal of the working-class Parisian faubourgs.' Then Daquin moves swiftly on to attack Orson Welles's popularity among film critics: 'And yet, among many of our critics someone like Orson Welles is more important than Carné, Clair, Grémillon or even Renoir.' Sadoul ends by welcoming Renoir into the Communist film aesthetics fold: 'For Renoir, the importance of the subject-matter goes beyond the form and determines it.'⁹⁴ Claude Mauriac responded to this discussion in *Le Figaro littéraire* by denouncing what he called the 'anti-cinematic' consequences of Daquin and Sadoul's position.⁹⁵ Yet here is what he wrote about Daquin's *Le Point du jour*: Referring to previous films dealing with mining, including that of Pabst, *Comradeship* (*Kameradschaft*), and comparing them to *Le Point du jour*, he argued that:

⁹³ 'le plafonnage des décors', a direct attack on Orson Welles' use of specially-designed 'expressionist' ceilings in *Citizen Kane*.

⁹⁴ 'Entretien Sadoul-Daquin sur *Le Point du jour*', *La Nouvelle Critique*, n° 3, February 1949, pp. 78-84.

⁹⁵ *Le Figaro Littéraire*, 29 March 1949.

Their spectacular cruelty pales when compared to the gentle Romanticism and undistorted veracity of Daquin's sober images. There is no tragedy here, unless it is the tragedy of the everyday which does not need any drama to ignite. [...]

We are told, and it is true, that the public only goes to the cinema to escape and not to watch the story of their daily troubles. This would suggest, the argument goes, that a film like *Le Point du jour* would not be successful with the public. This is not a foregone conclusion. Because commercial failure in itself would not prove me wrong, it would only prove that Daquin is still for the time being in the avant-garde. [...]

We are entering into a new era, in terms of cinematic art, that is. Not so long ago, the only way film-makers could move us was through more or less heroic adventures and love stories. While they have not given up doing this, and Louis Daquin even less than the rest, they do it in a different way.

The glory and misery of the mine, that what this film is about. In Louis Daquin's work heroism, which is traditional in the cinema, appears in a new form to meet the demands of our time. [...]

Although we are eager to see a more virile kind of cinema, we still like gentle emotion. Coal-blackened faces and starry eyes: today that is what we need in order to be entertained without a guilty conscience.⁹⁶

La Nouvelle Critique did not miss the opportunity and published a sarcastic and triumphant editorial: 'Claude Mauriac, were you forced to take drugs or subjected to unbearable physical and moral pressures, or beaten and tortured in order to make you find Daquin's film remarkable? Of course not'. According to the Communist monthly, the overall consensus that welcomed *Le Point du jour* vindicated Socialist Realism and proved the legitimacy of Laurent Casanova's recommendations to the intellectuals: 'In fact, Laurent Casanova was right in the report which so amused Claude Mauriac, to indicate that the intellectuals and the artists who were able to adopt the ideological and political positions of the working class could see an 'immense field of free initiative and free creation'. Relishing the general positive reaction to *Le Point du jour*, the Communist monthly turned even more abusive towards those of the critics who did not totally embrace Daquin's film. *Combat*'s reviewer, Guy Marester, is a case in point. While he regretted 'the deliberate propaganda [which] makes the film heavy and sometimes makes the dialogues scarcely believable', he nevertheless praised the film for both containing 'the most beautiful images in the cinema today' and presenting the viewer 'with a truly realistic vision of the miners' condition'. In spite of all this, he was called a 'pathetic individual' (*un pauvre type*).

⁹⁶ *Le Figaro Littéraire*, 28 May 1949.

The reason for the acrimonious treatment of Guy Marester was probably his having pointed out that ‘beyond their preaching, the authors have not been able to make the camera lie to us. It shows a labour which will never be matched no matter what wages are given to the miner. The camera proves the Union delegate to be wrong: being a miner is not a job. [...] When the dialogue stops and lets us hear the noises of the workplace, the film attains a true grandeur, which is very moving in a direct and meaningful way.’⁹⁷ A similar kind of reservation emerged at the end of Jean Néry’s review of the film for *Franc-Tireur*: ‘What is the cause of this slight feeling of regret we feel coming out of the cinema ? Is it from the lack of a real conclusion ? Is it from the slightly overstated orthodoxy of some of its positions ? Or is it simply from the fact that for two hours we have witnessed the hapless fate of workers who are unable to escape from the mine and whom nobody really wants to see escaping ?’⁹⁸ To question the humanity and nobility of the mine’s world was unacceptable for the PCF only two years after the launch of ‘the battle for production’ in which the miners played a huge part at the Party’s bequest. In this light, the convergence of opinion between Mauriac the Gaullist and Sadoul the Communist may be seen as revealing their common sanctification of the working class and its hardships, as the inhuman work of the miners is glorified in *Le Point du jour*.⁹⁹ Indeed, what was at stake here was the working-class vote, which for many years the Gaullist movement and the PCF came to share.

These last comments call into question the extent of the revolutionary value of New Realism. At no point did the Communist critics seem to have stopped and reflected on the reasons behind the consensus around Daquin’s film. They simply hurried to claim victory, to hammer out that they were right and everybody else wrong and to erect New Realism as the truly French contemporary aesthetics. It does not seem to have occurred to them that such a unanimity might mean something altogether different. If the Right-wing press, in spite of what amounted to minor political quibbles, endorsed Daquin’s film — and before that Jacques Becker’s *Antoine et Antoinette* — was it not merely because it did not see in such

⁹⁷ *Combat*, 23 May 1949.

⁹⁸ *Franc-Tireur*, 21-22 May 1949.

⁹⁹ See Daquin entry in Roger Boussinot, *Encyclopédie du cinéma* (Paris: Bordas, 1995 (1967)), pp. 561-562, see also *L’Avant-Scène — Cinéma*, n° 205, 1 April 1978, p. 54.

films the slightest seed of subversion of bourgeois society? The community of mind around *Le Point du jour* proved that the conservative section of French society did not feel threatened in the least by any revolutionary undercurrent which might have been present in socialist realism. Therefore, during a period of hysterical ideological divisions, the type of aesthetics put forward by the PCF was perfectly acceptable to its political opponents. In other words, the revolutionary value of New Realism was non-existent.¹⁰⁰

Ironically some of the positions adopted in the 1950s were denounced twenty years later as reactionary by the new generation of Communist critics. In the very first pages of *Cinéma, Culture et Profit*, a small volume edited by a group of Communist film directors in 1975, the lack of a real policy for the defence of a more culturally aware form of cinema is exemplified in a footnote quoting Jean-Charles Edeline. The French producer wishes for ‘films which would not fall into a kind of intellectual and backward-looking esotericism which is ostensibly avant-garde but which is in fact cut off from a popular art and which has no regard whatsoever for the public.’¹⁰¹ This, the writers comment, is typical of reactionary ideology. Yet Edeline’s comment is conspicuously similar to Sadoul’s review of *Citizen Kane* in 1946. What is striking today is how narrow-minded, conservative and nationalistic, in other words, reactionary, Communist film criticism seems to have been during the Cold War period. Zhdanovism, even ‘*in French colours*’ was a dogmatic, reactionary kind of aesthetics. Fiction which did not conform to the dogma of New Realism was discarded as useless and dangerous American and/or bourgeois propagandistic rubbish. André Stil expressed it in a nutshell in *Le Premier Choc*. One of his female characters is portrayed as idle and lacking in political awareness: ‘She would kill time dressing up, reading fashion magazines, love stories, film magazines full of pictures, fiction (*des histoires inventées*), novels, listening to the radio, watching all the films that were on, indiscriminately’.¹⁰² In many respects the moral and cultural values promoted by the New Realism — sanctification

¹⁰⁰ The revolutionary value of a film’s subject-matter would become a point of discussion twenty years later, see chapter 6.

¹⁰¹ Collectif de cinéastes communistes, *Cinéma : Culture ou Profit* (Paris: La Nouvelle Critique, 1976), note 7, p. 11.

¹⁰² Stil, *Le Premier Choc*, p. 97.

of labour, family and nation — not only followed Stalin's dogma, it also echoed some of the conservative Vichyiste doctrines or, ironically, some of the positions defended by American conservatives.¹⁰³ After all, while homosexuals in Hollywood were accused of collusion with the 'commies' by Senator McCarthy, Jean Cocteau's homosexuality was among the misgivings Communist critics expressed towards his films, and for *L'Humanité* in February 1953 homosexuality and prostitution were two facets of American capitalism.¹⁰⁴ Irwin M. Wall concludes his book on the PCF during the Cold War by stating that 'The PCF is a Stalinist party, not a Leninist one. It is a mass organisation, multifaceted bureaucracy, tribune of the oppressed, and intermediary between the working class and the political system. It is not a revolutionary force.'¹⁰⁵ A study of Communist film criticism during the same period amply confirms his views.

2.2.4. Georges Sadoul and André Bazin: the Form and Content Debate

The rejection of formalism, along with the belief in the supremacy of the subject-matter, became the leitmotiv of Communist criticism for most of the 1950s. Its essence is summed up in the following answer of Sadoul to Pierre Kast:

If artists were to consider once and for all, that within this capitalist 'framework', the subject matter and the way it is treated are of secondary importance, if they were to descend to cosmopolitan subjects without any social dimension, if they were to content themselves with purely formal experiment, if they were to lapse into formalism, for that is what we are talking about here, then the fight to defend the cinema would lose sight of its cultural objectives and the present crisis would not be overcome. I am therefore convinced, my dear Kast, that today the emphasis must be on the problem of the subject-matter. The solution to this problem must be found for the sake of French cinematic art and the future of our film industry.¹⁰⁶

¹⁰³ The PCF also took over the Vichyiste icon that was Joan of Arc, see for instance 'Pour l'indépendance nationale', *Heures Claires*, n° 10, 4 May 1957, p. 5.

¹⁰⁴ McCarthyism was publicly disapproved in the United-States long before New Realism ever was by the PCF in France. '2 aspects du capitalisme: l'homosexualité, la prostitution', *L'Humanité*, n° 2623, 10 February 1952, p. 8.

¹⁰⁵ Wall, p. 241.

¹⁰⁶ Sadoul, 'Mettre l'accent sur le sujet', *La Nouvelle Critique*, n° 5, April 1949, pp. 92-100.

When one examines the films the PCF defended, one cannot help but notice the discrepancy between what the Communist critics advocated in theory and their actual choice of favourite films. Looking at the list of the 1951 French films worthy of Communist praise — Christian-Jaque's *Fanfan la Tulipe*, Jacques Becker's *Casque d'or*, Jean-Paul Le Chanois's *Agence matrimoniale*, Yves Allégret's *Nez de cuir*, René Clément's *Jeux interdits*, André Cayatte's *Nous sommes tous des assassins*, René Ménégoz's *La Commune* — one is struck by the heterogeneity of the selection.¹⁰⁷ With the exception of Robert Ménégoz, whose collage film on the Paris Commune was obviously different and of a more political nature, all the others are made by well-known popular 1950s French directors.¹⁰⁸ Most of them were either Party members (Christian-Jaque, Robert Ménégoz, Jean-Paul Le Chanois) or close to the Party's policy in terms of their support for the 'Defence of French Cinema' campaigns organised by the PCF (René Clément, Jacques Becker, Yves Allégret). The leading actors were also either fellow-travellers (Gérard Philipe) or again associated with the above-mentioned campaigns (Bernard Blier, Mouloudji).¹⁰⁹ Yet when Sadoul called for the emphasis to be put on the subject-matter, did he have in mind the escapist swashbuckling Franco-Italian coproduction which *Fanfan la Tulipe* was? The film can hardly be seen as representative of New Realism. Well received in the French press as a whole, it was praised by Communist critics for being typically French, and as a statement against war.¹¹⁰ *Fanfan la Tulipe* aside, the other films depicted the lives of ordinary people (*Casque d'or*, *Agence matrimoniale*, *Nez de cuir*) or tended to raise moral issues such as the death penalty (*Nous*

¹⁰⁷ 'Sept films de 1951 prouvent que le cinéma français doit vivre', *L'Humanité Dimanche*, n° 181, 19 March 1952.

¹⁰⁸ The dearth of French films dealing with such an extraordinary historical event as La Commune is hard to explain and would be worth investigating. Robert Ménégoz is not mentioned in Billard, nor in Jean-Loup Passek, *Dictionnaire du cinéma* (Paris: Larousse, 1995).

¹⁰⁹ Contrary to what is commonly thought, Gérard Philipe and his wife, Anne, never were party-members. Needless to say though, the PCF was more than pleased to see that an actor of such phenomenal popularity espoused many of its positions, in particular in relation to the Peace movement and the film unions. See Georges Sadoul, *Gérard Philipe*, *Cinéma d'aujourd'hui* [51] (Paris: Seghers, 1967), p. 168.

¹¹⁰ Even André Bazin defended it in *Le Parisien Libéré*: '[The authors] have portrayed their hero against an historical background which is both realistic and conventional and which allows them to draw a witty and moral satire. Fanfan's virtues stand against the silliness, the oafishness, the injustice and the cruelty of the world', 26 March 1952. Janine Bouissounouse in *Ce Soir*, 26 March 1952. 'Fanfan la Tulipe is a jolly fellow who prefers love to war' in *L'Humanité Dimanche*, 6 April 1952. In 1955, the film was shown in Russia under the title *Fanfan Toulpan*. *Le Monde* reported that the Russian spectators were 'delighted with this lively and humorous film, having particularly enjoyed its anti-war message', 25 January 1955.

sommes tous des assassins) or children's attitude when confronted to war (*Jeux interdits*). While *Casque d'Or* was a period piece praised for its typically French style, although, according to Sadoul, Becker should tackle more contemporary issues, the other films were set in the present.¹¹¹ I would make my own Pierre Billard's opinion about Le Chanois's films: 'they deliver a social criticism marked by its good nature and its empathy towards the neediest but they do it in the most conventional of film styles.'¹¹² Even André Cayatte was now able to find a place in the Communist pantheon. His propensity to tackle real and controversial contemporary issues was bound to appeal to Sadoul and his Party's colleagues. André Cayatte became one of the great exponents of the *film à thèse*, a genre which the PCF has consistently favoured.¹¹³ Albert Cohen managed nevertheless to criticise *Nous sommes tous des assassins* for portraying a murderer who learned his 'trade' with the Resistance.¹¹⁴

This mixed bag of films tends to privilege content over form. None of them can be said to be aesthetic milestones of the 1950s. Indeed, except for a few maverick directors, French cinema in the 1950s has not been remembered for its stylistic audacity. Several of the above directors were to become the butt of the future New Wave directors' harsh criticism. They entered into the scope of what Truffaut called the *tradition de qualité*. Interestingly, André Bazin himself in an article entitled 'André Cayatte's cybernetics' took up the defence of the director.¹¹⁵ But whereas the Communist critics praised Cayatte for his choice of subject-matters, Bazin praised the effectiveness of Cayatte's film style. While he reproaches the French director for creating a world which is much too rational and logical and leaves no room for 'mystery and ambiguity', he nevertheless finds Cayatte's *mise-en-scène* 'exceptionally efficient' and his films 'useful [...] thanks less to their purely intellectual solidity than to the efficiency of their form.' Sadoul defended Cayatte's films for their subject-matter, Bazin for their form. What we have here is the great critical debate of the late 1940s and early 1950s to which I would now like to turn my attention.

¹¹¹ Sadoul, 'Puissance de la sobriété, *Casque d'or*', *Les Lettres françaises*, April 1952, p. 11.

¹¹² Billard, p. 492.

¹¹³ See chapters 6 and 8.

¹¹⁴ *L'Humanité*, n° 2516, 8 October 1952.

¹¹⁵ Bazin, 'La cybernétique d'André Cayatte', *Cahiers du cinéma*, n° 36, June 1954, pp. 22-27.

The discussion between Georges Sadoul and Louis Daquin which was discussed earlier in relation to *Le Point du jour* may be seen as the starting point of a lively and heated debate on the issue of form and content among French film critics.¹¹⁶ The following month, Louis Daquin drove the point home in a paper entitled 'some uncalled-for remarks' published in *L'Écran français*.¹¹⁷ The discreet accusations present in the article on *Le Point du jour* had turned into precise and violent accusations against a certain tendency of French criticism, namely the young critics and the animators of the avant-garde film society, *Objectif 49*. After exposing his incomprehension of, and indifference to, their 'philosophico-aesthetico-technical jargon', Daquin questions the positions of these critics, blaming in particular Alexandre Astruc: 'What have they discovered? Or rather what do they think they have discovered. What are they calling for? A formal revolution, the possibility of questioning every aesthetic issue and launching new formulas such as "film, an abstract art" dixit Astruc who, after making himself known by despising Chaplin, now says: "to abstract is to humanise"'. Then, after denouncing once again the young critics' interest in lenses and film sets, Louis Daquin gives his own definition of a film critic's duty and explains that the young critics are making a mistake when they 'start reacting against the public, because of their contempt at such a popular art.' As the article continues, the Communist director's charges become more acrimonious. After calling them snobs he accuses the young critics of ignoring the true situation of most French directors and of not supporting them, this is why 'today, let me tell you that you are not worthy of this right and this independence that our elders have had so much trouble acquiring. You are not worthy of this right and this independence because you misuse them.' Daquin concludes by linking the young critics' positions with bourgeois and capitalist politics since the 'fictional and dubious values' they defend result from 'an aesthetics and a formalism destined to mask the sterile vacuum of the only works still tolerated by a bourgeoisie which tries in vain to prevent its degeneration and a capitalist society intent on destroying every move towards the advent of a free and blissful humanity.'

It is essential to remember that while Daquin and Sadoul shared the same views, it is Daquin

¹¹⁶ See above, p. 106.

¹¹⁷ Daquin, 'Quelques remarques déplacées', *L'Écran français*, n° 193, 8 March 1949, pp. 3 & 10.

who took up the offensive. Daquin was a director, not a film critic. It is as a director and as a Communist that Daquin accused some critics of not supporting French directors enough, of having no sense of civic responsibility — just as in the 1990s it is Claude Berri, a director, who complains that French critics do nothing to help French cinema when they criticise his films. Indeed by criticising the young critics, Daquin anticipated his own position against the young directors of the New Wave by ten years. It was in *L'Écran français* that Alexandre Astruc exposed his concept of the ‘*caméra-stylo*’ in ‘Naissance d’une nouvelle avant-garde’, one of the programmatic texts of the New Wave.¹¹⁸

While Alexandre Astruc was the only name mentioned in Louis Daquin’s controversial point of view, his attacks were aimed at many others, among whom, Maurice Schérer — also known as Éric Rohmer — Roger Leenhardt and last but not least André Bazin. Following Daquin’s article, the question of form and content dominated the debates organised by *L'Écran français* which brought together leading film critics and historians. Two such debates took place respectively in March and April 1949.¹¹⁹ Two leading participants stood out: Georges Sadoul, the Communist film critic and renowned film historian and André

¹¹⁸ Astruc, ‘Naissance d’une nouvelle avant-garde, la caméra stylo’, *L'Écran français*, n° 144, 30 March 1948, p. 5.

¹¹⁹ ‘At the *Maison de la Pensée française*, under the aegis of *L'Écran français*, the ‘Sadoul+Bazin+the public’ debate on avant-garde and film became the “battle of form and content”’, *L'Écran français*, n° 194, 15 March 1949, pp. 2 & 13; Michel Favier-Ledoux, ‘Y a-t-il une crise du sujet dans le cinéma français?’, *ibid.*, n° 198, 12 April 1949, p. 7. The list of participants included directors: Alexandre Astruc, René Clément, Louis Daquin, Jean Grémillon, Roger Leenhardt, Carlo Rim, Pierre Véry, and film critics: *L'Écran français*’s Raymond Barkan; *Le Parisien Libéré*’s; *Action*’s Roger Boussinot, *Les Nouvelles Littéraires*’s Georges Charensol, Simone Dubreuilh from *La Radiodiffusion Française*, *Libération*’s Jeander, René Jeanne, Président de l’Association Française de la Critique de Cinéma; *Combat*’s Denis Marion, *Franc-Tireur*’s Jean Néry, *L'Époque*’s Roger Régent, *Les Lettres Françaises*’s Georges Sadoul, Jean Thévenot from *La Radiodiffusion Française*. Whereas Sadoul and Bazin profoundly respected each other, there was no love lost between Daquin and Astruc. This is how Astruc relates the period in his autobiography: ‘As I said, they were a few of us quietly minding our own business, that is to say defending American cinema, refusing the dictatorship of Film unions, shrugging our shoulders at the self-righteous souls who were screaming blue murder at the Blum-Byrnes agreements which were going to reduce our film workers to misery. But it was Comrade Louis Daquin that we held up to public opprobrium. Louis Daquin, the eye of Moscow... who was destined to direct film as much as I was to unblock sinks. [...] Daquin had in fact joined the PCF in order to be forgiven for asking to be in charge of the German-controlled French film news during the Occupation. He would come right under our nose and reproach us vehemently for our formal digressions, for admiring Hitchcock’s and Welles’ tracking and crane shots instead of looking into the misery of the poor and in particular the unions. “Daquin, you are a pain in the neck”, I answered him sharply once. “We don’t give a damn about your unions. Filming pride, that’s what I am interested in” (I had just seen *The Magnificent Ambersons*, naturally)’, Alexandre Astruc, *Le Montreur d’ombres* (Paris: Bartillat, 1996), p. 66. The quarrel between Daquin and Astruc goes back to the early days of *L'Écran français*, see ‘Une nouvelle querelle des anciens et des modernes?’, n° 6, August 1945, pp. 6-7.

Bazin, leading spokesman of the young critics and future co-founder of the *Cahiers du cinéma*. These two film critics, who held each other in high esteem, embodied in 1949 the two sides of the debate. For Sadoul, the question of form was no longer relevant, what represented the avant-garde now was the choice of subject-matter, what the director chooses to talk about, not how to talk about it. With regard to the debate around form and content, Sadoul voiced his views without resorting to the highly polemical mode of his fellow party-member. According to Bazin, who with Kast replied to Daquin in *L'Écran français*, the aesthetic issues which the young critics raised should not be seen as conflicting with the defence of French cinema but on the contrary as complementary to the struggle of the film trade.¹²⁰ Bazin, who reminds Daquin of his own involvement in the *Comité de Défense du Cinéma Français*, wonders whether there was 'an inferiority complex on the film professionals' part towards the critics'. Both Kast and Bazin acknowledge the difficulties with which the industry is confronted and express their solidarity with French directors and technicians. Antoine de Baecque points out the three directions of French film criticism at the end of the 1940s: 'the "progressive" critique around Georges Sadoul with an emphasis on national genres (Soviet and French), a criticism centred on aesthetic and formal issues as represented by Jean-Georges Auriol's *La Revue du Cinéma*, which tackled neo-realist films and American directors such as Welles, Huston, Sturges, Wyler and the "*Néo-Hollywoodiens*" who concerned themselves with mise-en-scène in commercial American directors such as Hitchcock and Hawks.'¹²¹ The debates around the issue of form and content echoed these different trends. Content was the leitmotiv of the progressive school of criticism as represented by Sadoul whereas form was the main interest of the two others. De Baecque reminds us that Bazin 'tried to act as the link between these different tendencies'. In 1953, it was Bazin who opposed his own 'young Turks' in *Cahiers du Cinéma* by stressing, against Schérer and Hitchcock, the importance of the subject-matter in John

¹²⁰ This right to reply given to the two critics shows that there still existed then an atmosphere of tolerance within the film magazine. Such an open debate would be out of question a year later, 'André Bazin et Pierre Kast répondent à Louis Daquin', *L'Écran français*, 29 March 1949, n° 196, pp. 3 & 10.

¹²¹ Antoine de Baecque, *Cahiers du cinéma, histoire d'une revue — 1. A l'assaut du cinéma* (Paris: Éditions Cahiers du cinéma, 1991), p. 48.

Huston's *Red Badge of Courage* or even *African Queen*, and in 1954 it was again André Bazin who defended Claude Autant-Lara's *Le Blé en herbe*.¹²² This places André Bazin at the centre of French criticism as the one who tried if not to reconcile — that would have been impossible — at least to keep the dialogue among the different critical trends open. More importantly, by refusing to condemn outright the films of the *tradition de qualité* Bazin showed both his resistance to the critical discourse of the 'young Turks' — Astruc, Truffaut, Scherer/Rohmer, among others — and his belonging to the 'family' of French cinema.¹²³ Bazin's positions might have had their role in putting an end to the quarrel between himself and Sadoul over Soviet cinema under Stalin.

The big rift between Bazin and Sadoul, albeit not an irremediable one, came in August 1950 after the former published 'The Myth of Stalin in the Soviet Cinema' in *Esprit*.¹²⁴ Dudley Andrew offers a comprehensive account of the quarrel in his book on the co-founder of *Cahiers du cinéma*. Bazin's criticism of Socialist Realism in particular in the films glorifying Stalin prompted an angry response from French Communist quarters. In his article Bazin criticises Stalin's use of film to 'turn himself into a myth to make timeless his historic position as dictator' by setting the Soviet leader's use of film against previous periods of Soviet cinema. Dudley Andrew describes both Bazin's views and Sadoul's reply:

In all the films made about Stalin during and just after World War II the situation portrayed was historic, indeed taken from the very immediate past; but Stalin as hero was made a transcendent being above history and above the concrete situations within which he was shown to act. Subordinate characters were treated in relation to Stalin, not to history. The problem was further exacerbated by the odd but crucial fact that Stalin necessarily became both a film star and a political dictator. [...] In an article entitled '*Esprit* and its myths' [Sadoul] accused Bazin of trying to censor the only viable alternative to bourgeois Hollywood pap. The weakness of the body of his argument confirms our current conception of the mindless dogmatism in the party during that era. He claimed that Bazin and *Esprit* were afraid of Stalin, of his power and vitality as well as of his transcendence. He further claimed that recent histories had

¹²² *Cahiers du cinéma*, n° 27, October 1953 in Baecque, p. 48; *Cahiers du cinéma*, n° 32, February 1954 in Baecque, p. 305.

¹²³ In the aftermath of the Liberation Bazin used to contribute, along with Communists, to the activities of *Travail et Culture*, a leftist cultural organization destined to make culture available to the people at large until the divisive Cold War politics drove him out. See Dudley Andrew, *André Bazin* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1978), pp. 85-94 and 137-139.

¹²⁴ Bazin, 'Le mythe de Staline dans le cinéma soviétique', *Esprit*, August 1950, pp. 210-235.

shown that Stalin did indeed save Stalingrad single-handedly and thereby save the West.¹²⁵

Interestingly, Jacques Doniol-Valcroze, another co-founder of the *Cahiers du cinéma*, went to the Soviet Union in October 1952 — with, among others, Georges Sadoul — and came back defending the Stalinist hagiography of Chiaureli's *The Fall of Berlin*.¹²⁶ Dudley Andrew underlines that 'historically, of course, Bazin has been justified. Post-war Soviet cinema has largely been forgotten, even in Russia'. He could have added that the refutation of Sadoul's main arguments came from his own camp. In his secret report to the Twentieth Congress of the Soviet Union Communist Party, Khrushchev himself ridiculed the films Sadoul defended so ardently:

In the same vein, let us take, for instance, our historical and military films and some literary creations; they make us feel sick. Their true objective is the propagation of the theme of praising Stalin as a military genius. Let us recall the film, *The Fall of Berlin*. Here only Stalin Acts; he issues orders in the hall in which there are many empty chairs and only one man approached him and reports something to him — that is Piskrebyshev, his loyal shield-bearer. (Laughter in the hall.)

And where is the military command? Where is the Political Bureau? Where is the Government? What are they doing and with what are they engaged? There is nothing about them in the film, Stalin acts for everybody; he does not reckon with anyone; he asks no one for Advice. Everything is shown to the nation in this false light. Why? In order to *surround Stalin with glory*, contrary to the facts and contrary to historical truth. (my emphasis.)

The question arises: and where are the military, on whose shoulders rested the burden of the war? They are not in the film; with Stalin in, no room was left for them.¹²⁷

2.2.5. An Admission of Failure

The quarrel which opposed Sadoul and Bazin exemplified the dogmatism of the Communist critics. Politics played an overwhelming part in the definition of Communist film aesthetics and in the critics' stance during the Cold War era. It led critics to overlook films which should have deserved better support. Jean Grémillon's *L'Amour d'une femme* (1953-

¹²⁵ Andrew, pp. 138-144.

¹²⁶ Baecque, pp. 167-168.

¹²⁷ Nikita S. Khrushchev, *The Secret Speech* (Nottingham: Spokesman Books, 1976), p. 56.

4) is a case in point.¹²⁸ Jean Grémillon was a long-standing fellow-traveller. He participated in the Liberation of French cinema and as president of the Technicians union took part in the purge committees.¹²⁹ Later on he lent his voice to the Communist/‘Mouvement de la Paix’ propaganda film directed by Henri Aisner, *Le Choix le plus simple*.¹³⁰ In 1954, Grémillon released what would turn out to be his last feature film, *L’Amour d’une femme*. The film stars Micheline Presle who plays Marie Prieur, a young doctor who chooses to stay on the isle of Ouessant instead of giving up her job to marry an Italian engineer (Massimo Girotti) with whom she had fallen in love. The film proved a commercial failure. Suffering from an extremely poor distribution, it was screened in the Studio de l’Étoile for only four weeks and disappeared altogether from Parisian screens after only ten weeks. The critical reception given to Grémillon’s film was symptomatic of the period, with the diverging trends of French criticism coming to the fore. Globally speaking the film was rather positively reviewed by the Left, and criticised by the Right. Among its defenders, *Télérama*’s André Bazin, *Combat*’s Rodolphe-Maurice Arlaud, *La Croix*’s Jean Rochereau all mentioned the difficulties experienced by Grémillon over the years, which led to a frustrating production on the director’s part, with the latter critic mentioning the possibility of a near political censorship. Sadoul and Monjo, who also regretted that the director was not able to make more films, were obviously more straightforward in their political interpretation. While Sadoul blamed Léon Blum for Grémillon’s forced silence, Monjo, who compared the film with recent Soviet productions, explained that the hostility towards *L’Amour d’une femme* was due to the French regime’s opposition to women’s emancipation and happiness, which proved once more ‘the superiority of the Soviet system over the French one’. As far as the film is concerned, few reviewers were ecstatic about the film. If Grémillon’s sensitive simplicity is commended by many, the ‘weaknesses’ of the scenario are often mentioned. Both Bazin and Sadoul insisted on, and praised the social, everyday character of the story.

¹²⁸ On the critical reception of the film, see Laurent Marie, ‘La réception critique de *L’Amour d’une femme*’, 1895, hors-série Jean Grémillon, October 1997, pp. 83-99. For a complete version of this article and the list of references, see appendice 6, pp. 351-366.

¹²⁹ Letter dated signed by Jean Grémillon, Paris, Bibliothèque de l’Arsenal, Fonds Jean Grémillon.

¹³⁰ See *Le Choix le plus simple*, Bibliothèque Nationale de France, site François Mitterrand, cote IKM. 003513.3.

On the negative side, François Truffaut disliked the film's 'easy gloom and pessimism, characteristic of the production of the time' and its 'pre-war' style. As he considered that the film was not in any way inferior to Grémillon's best films, it is obvious that, for Truffaut, Grémillon was among the directors he attacked and that *L'Amour d'une femme* belonged to the *tradition de qualité* the 'young Turk' was denouncing at the time. The most virulent reviews came from the Right-wing press (Louis Chauvet, Jean Dutourd, François Vinneuil, G. Martain), although some managed to praise the director's lyricism and poetry in his depiction of the Breton land and seascapes. Most reproaches are addressed to the film's scenario. Thus the film critic of the recent modernist weekly *L'Express* considered that the film was made up of a collection of clichés, in particular in its depiction of women's issues. So the left-wing critics praised the social dimension of the film (Doniol-Valcroze, Dubreuilh, Sadoul, Bazin), while others refused to acknowledge this aspect and concentrated their criticism on the formal characteristic of the film (Truffaut, *L'Express*).

L'Express's rejection of the contemporaneity of the film's subject-matter was surprising since few film dealt with the issue of a woman's freedom to choose her own destiny. Looking at women's magazines, one would think that on the contrary Grémillon was ahead of his time. Neither *Elle* nor *Marie-France* defend Marie Prieur's preference of her job to her lover. For their part *Femmes d'aujourd'hui* and *Le Nouveau Fémina* do not even mention the film.

In view of both Grémillon's political inclination and *L'Amour d'une femme*'s subject-matter, the Communist reception of the film should have been much more enthusiastic and supportive than it actually was. The Communist women's press, represented by *Heures Claires*, *Femmes françaises* and *Filles de France*, granted the film a positive reception but without any passion. In terms of women's issues, the main campaign of the time was for 'pain-free childbirth' with titles such as 'Women are the real life-givers'. Marie Prieur's decision to stick to her job rather than breed children for her Italian lover, as he asks her to, may have been too daring. Yet Daquin's *Le Point du jour* contains a similar scene in which Marie tells her would-be husband that she will not get married to get stuck at home, to which

he replies ‘and what if we have kids’. After some reluctance, Georges accepts Marie’s viewpoint and, in keeping with Socialist Realism, is even proud of her decision to go to work. *L’Amour d’une femme* emphasised the work ethic over sentimentalism, yet this was not enough for the Communist critics. The film centres on the conflict between two individuals, neither of them working class. Moreover, the truly feminist dimension of the film would not have been picked up by the PCF. In the 1950s, Gisèle Moreau explains that, although the Party considered that women were as exploited as their male counterparts and were full-blown citizens in their own rights, it did not admit feminism as an autonomous women’s struggle.¹³¹ Thus a report on a one-day meeting on the Party’s activity with regard to women shows the writers’ satisfaction that ‘women had not come to complain about their male comrades who do not understand them and that they did not raise the issues they wanted to discuss from a feminist point of view as had previously been the case, but as Communists whose task is to preserve peace in order for their small ones to have a better future’. As the film’s closure rested on the decision of *one woman* and was not in any way demonstrative — ‘The film does not teach anything, does not plead for anything’, Grémillon said — the PCF could not turn it into an ideological weapon.

During a meeting of the PCF’s Central Committee in May 1955, Jeannette Vermeersch, Maurice Thorez’s wife and a leader of the Party in her own right, criticised the Communists’ lack of support for Grémillon’s film. While she called the Communists to use film as a propaganda tool, she was not thinking of socialist realist films. Vermeersch, and Thorez in the background, simply asked for ‘heart-warming’ films (*des films qui fassent chaud au cœur*) which would speak to them a little’.¹³² This is an amazing admission of the failure of

¹³¹ Gisèle Moreau, *Libres et égales* (Paris : Messidor-Éditions sociales, 1982), pp. 21-22.

¹³² ‘Can cinema be put to better use? I think so. We have the equipment, we have the films [Maurice Thorez in the background: “good film”] We even have a few French films. In fact one must regret by the by that French film-makers, while claiming to defend French cinema, are in fact producing servile copies of American detective films. And particularly because they have made some excellent films, which could be used... For example, *Un Amour de femme* (sic), Maurice mentioned it to me recently, in which there is a love story between a man and a woman, where a woman struggles to continue with her job, a terrific job, she is a doctor, she takes care of sailors at sea, etc, what I mean is that it is a very human positive film, made by a Communist [Thorez: which the bourgeoisie destroyed, which even our own comrades didn’t support, if only they had shown the film at women’s meeting...] We have quite a few film like that which we could use to bring people together, to show them a good film, a heart-warming film, which at the same time speaks to them a little. We don’t use the film medium enough’, Intervention of Jeannette Vermeersch to the 12 May

Socialist Realism both as an aesthetics and a revolutionary tool, as well as evidence of the self-imposed isolation the PCF. Communist critics failed to make an impact on the critical stage. It is Bazin one remembers as the most influential French film critic of the period, not Sadoul. The influence of the PCF's critics among their own flock might even be called into question when one thinks of the outstanding popular success of Duvivier's *Le Petit Monde de Don Camillo* in 1952, at a time when the PCF was extremely active.¹³³ Although the film was paradoxically described as an anti-Communist film depicting sympathetic Communists, millions of French people saw it and its sequel, *Le Retour de Don Camillo*, and it is difficult to imagine that there was not a single Communist or sympathiser among them.¹³⁴

In spite of the Party's influence within the film industry, the PCF's own brand of aesthetics, New Realism, never really caught the imagination of French film directors. Given the conservatism of the Party's cultural policy, exemplified by the form and content debate, there is little surprise in finding the Communist critics spending most of the decade defending the films of the *tradition de qualité*. In doing so Communist critics backed the bulk of 1950s French production, which might be one of the reasons why, in spite of its defence of an aesthetics which was so blatantly a denial of the freedom of the artist, of thought, of expression, the PCF managed not to lose all its credibility in the film world. Yet both their Stalinist stance and their support for the *tradition de qualité* alienated Communist critics from many of the young critics who were to become the future New Wave directors. The second chapter of part II of this study will examine whether this had any bearings on the

1955 in Aubervilliers, sound recording, Bobigny: Archives départementales de la Seine-Saint-Denis, Parti Communiste Français,

¹³³ The film was released the week after the PCF had staged the demonstrations against General Ridgway (nicknamed 'Ridgway the Plague' or 'General Microbe' following his participation in the Korean War), which led to Stil and Duclos's arrests. See *L'Humanité*, n° 2403, 27 May 1952; n° 2404, 28 May 1952; n° 2405, 29 May 1952; n° 2406, 30 May 1952; n° 2407, 31 May 1952; n° 2408, 2 June 1952; n° 2410, 4 June 1952 and Philippe Robrieux, *Histoire intérieure du Parti communiste*, vol. 2 (1945-72) (Paris: Fayard, 1981), pp. 300-308.

¹³⁴ Francis Cohen, *L'Humanité*, n° 2412, 6 June 1952; Georges Sadoul, 'La Chèvre et le chou, *Le Petit monde de Don Camillo*, *Les Lettres françaises / L'Écran français*, n° 418, 13-20 June 1952, p. 9; for a reaction to Sadoul's negative review, see Jean Thévenot, 'A propos du "*Petit Monde de Don Camillo*"', *Les Lettres françaises*, n° 420, 27 June-4 July 1952, p. 9. Thévenot regrets Sadoul's purely ideological reading of the film, and asks that the film is seen as jolly good entertainment. Fifteen years later, the debate around the question of ideology and entertainment would reappear with the success of Gérard Oury's *La Grande Vadrouille*, see chapter 6, pp. 226-32.

Communist reception of the New Wave.

During the Liberation and the Cold War periods, the PCF was able to assert its authority on the film industry's workforce, thanks mostly to its backing of the industry's demands and its continuous campaigning for the defence of French cinema. Politics played as much a part in this when the PCF was part of France's government as when it was in a position of extreme political opposition and isolation during the Cold War. Having been denied control of the industry, the PCF became twice as active in the defence of the industry which it now deemed weakened due to American competition. The future of the country's 'second industry' as it was called in the aftermath of the war became central when in the context of the Western-Easter conflict, the PCF became, in its own words, the sole protector of the nation's interests. One of the lasting consequences of this policy was to have established within the film trade a lasting disposition for protesting and rallying in the face of danger. While the benefits of this tradition can still be felt today, there is little left of the PCF's critical discourse during the same period. Indeed it is the discrepancy between the influence of the PCF and the *Fédération du Spectacle* in the trade and its inability to leave its mark on the films produced at the time. On the contrary, the excessive dogmatism of the PCF's Stalinist critical discourse would affect the way Communist critics would be perceived for many years, even though, as will be examined in the future chapters, this discourse would be limited to the period. Aesthetically and in critical terms the failure of the PCF is blatant. This is not true only of film: there is not any book on French Socialist Realist painters and, to my knowledge, André Stil's *Le Premier Choc* has yet to be put on the French *baccalauréat*'s curriculum. The Communist critics defended the *Tradition de qualité* cinema for the wrong reasons.¹³⁵ They castigated the young critics for the wrong reasons as well. Fortunately for this researcher, they became aware of this relatively early.

¹³⁵ For a defence of the *Tradition de qualité*, see Noël Burch and Geneviève Sellier, *La Drôle de guerre des sexes du cinéma français* (Paris: Nathan, 1997).

Part II

The New Republic

Chapter 3: The New Republic: Film Policy

3.1. The Birth of the Fifth Republic

Although Stalin died in April 1953, his disappearance did not put an end to the Cold War. Signs of détente did not materialise for another few years. By 1957, if the international situation might not have been as tense as it was five years before, the West versus East conflict remained nevertheless a reality. Throughout the period the French Communist Party proved a fervent ally of the Soviet bloc. Significantly it endorsed the Russian military intervention against the Hungarian insurrection in November 1956 while it showed some difficulty, not to say reluctance, in accepting, and making public in its own press, Khrushchev's denunciation of Stalin's crimes during the 20th Congress of the Communist Party of the USSR.¹ Both events took place after the January 1956 French general elections which gave a majority to the Left, with the Communists taking 25.8% of the votes and 146 seats and the Socialists and Radicals taking 28 % and 170 seats. The PCF took this opportunity to try and come out of the isolation in which it had been confined since 1948 and hoped for a type of agreement similar to that of the Popular Front. Guy Mollet turned down the Communist offer and formed a government with the Socialists and the Radicals. In May 1957, the Right and the PCF brought down Mollet's government. Less than three years later the Communists would be left with only 10 deputies in the first assembly of the Fifth Republic. Between 1956 and 1962 France went through its most eventful period since World War II and the Liberation years. The fall of the Fourth Republic followed by the return to power of General de Gaulle, both as the result of the Algerian War (*les événements d'Algérie* as they were commonly described at the time) kept the country's politicians busy and its population worried. Both the radical constitutional changes brought about by the new republic, and the means to put an end to the Algerian War became the main concern. While the PCF clearly opposed de Gaulle's new constitution by portraying it as a kind of *coup*

¹ This is now acknowledged by the PCF, see 'PCF: un tragique soutien à l'URSS', *L'Humanité*, 28 October 1996.

d'état endangering democracy, it also experienced some difficulty in terms of its attitude towards the Algerian people's struggle for independence. This ambivalence was illustrated by the Party's early calls for 'Peace in Algeria', eventually replaced by overt slogans supporting the 'Independence of the Algerian people'.² The ambiguity of some of the PCF's positions tried the patience of some of its activists and fellow-travellers. The PCF's pro-Soviet orthodoxy in particular led to many departures from the Party and may explain its decrease in influence within the film industry, a sector particularly sensitive to issues of freedom of speech and censorship.³ In the previous chapter, I have shown how the international political situation bore on the corporate issues of the French film industry insofar as French cinema had to be protected from predatory foreign film industries. In the present one, a similar type of phenomenon will be examined. In other words the changes which occurred from the year 1956 onwards both externally and internally affected in their own way the film industry. First I will address the PCF's reactions to the setting up of the Common Market within the industry and secondly I will examine the Communist response to the reforms that followed Malraux's nomination as minister of state for Cultural affairs in 1959.

3.2. The Dangers of the Common Market: Europe as Predator

France's rejection of the EDC (European Defence Committee) in August 1954 only postponed the coming together of Western European countries.⁴ Three years later, on 27 March 1957, the Treaties of Rome were signed by six countries: Belgium, France, Holland, Italy, Luxembourg and Germany. One treaty marked the official birth of the European

² A film on the 16th Congress of the PCF in Saint-Denis produced by the PCF in 1961 illustrates this uneasiness. On the one hand, Roland Leroy reads a message from the Algerian Communist Party which ends on 'Long live the independence and peace of Algeria', on the other hand, reading his closure speech, a diminished Maurice Thorez does not utter the word independence and speaks only of peace based on free self-determination, *Images du 16e congrès du Parti communiste français: St Denis 1961*, Parti communiste français (prod.), Paris: Bibliothèque Nationale de France François Mitterrand, Cote: IKM.003511.3.

³ Among the departees were Roger Vailland, Claude Roy, Claude Morgan and Jacques-Francis Rolland.

⁴ The question of the rearmament of Germany, which brought together Communists and Gaullists against the EDC, was dealt with in 1955, with Germany joining NATO and starting to rearm. See Maurice Agulon, *The French Republic, 1879-1992*, trans. Antonia Nevill (Oxford UK & Cambridge USA: Blackwell, 1993), pp. 352-366 and Robert Gildea, *France after 1945* (Oxford: OUP, 1997), p. 15.

Economic Community (EEC), also known as the Common Market. The other one referred to Euratom, which established an atomic community, 'both to develop new forms of energy and to control the nuclear projects of the Federal Republic'.⁵ The PCF maintained the same anti-European positions it held during the intensive campaigns against the EDC and voted against the ratification of the Treaties, but to no avail since the National Assembly ratified them by 342 votes to 239 in July 1957.

Whereas for the Communists the threat posed by the EDC was mainly a military one, since it was considered an aggressive step towards war, the setting up of the EEC was criticised mostly on economic grounds.⁶ Euratom was portrayed as a military menace in disguise but 'the Common Market has been put in place in order to satisfy the natural interests of a capitalist economy in need of the concentration of both capital and large industry in the form of international cartels...'⁷ What was at stake then was France's economic independence. As could be expected, this was echoed in the Communist reactions to the EEC in relation to the film industry. The question arises therefore whether the PCF was able to mobilise and attract as many supporters within the industry as it had done against the Blum-Byrnes agreements in the early 1950s. If the Common Market was as dangerous to the national film trade as, I will now examine, the Communists claimed, one would expect a strong response from the industry in which the *Fédération du Spectacle* remained a very influential union.

In June 1957 in the aftermath of the signature of the Treaties of Rome but before ratification through parliament, several articles were published in the Communist press or in publications linked to the PCF. They all emphatically denounced the impact of the Common Market on French cinema.

The first issue of *Mise au point*, the journal of the *Cercle* Charles-Chezeau, exposed all the Communists' arguments against the Common Market. This short-lived magazine — there seems to have been only one issue — was the outlet for the Communists working in the

⁵ Gildea, p. 16.

⁶ For a detailed presentation of the French Communist positions on the EDC and the EEC, see Rubens Pinto Lyra, *Le Parti communiste français et l'intégration européenne* (Nancy: Université de Nancy II, 1974).

⁷ *L'Humanité*, 6 July 1957.

French film industry.⁸ Charles Chezeau, himself a Communist, had been very active during the campaigns for the defence of French cinema which followed the Blum-Byrnes agreements, and had held several top positions in the *Fédération du Spectacle*, including that of secretary general, before his death in 1957.⁹ In six articles, the tone and content of which are unmistakably those of the PCF, the different appallingly negative consequences of the Common Market in relation to the film industry are evoked. The first one deals with the 'European' spirit (*L'esprit « européen »*) and sums up the French Communist anti-European credo: i.e. that the EEC, like the ECD before it, is an economic, political and military (thanks to the setting-up of Euratom) alliance directed against the Eastern popular democracies and the USSR: 'the Europe of the Six does not mean a better peace but on the contrary an aggravation of international tension'. Consequently, 'European' films would have to propagate the spirit of an Atlanticist 'free Europe' against its socialist counterpart. The second article, entitled 'A free hand to American films', explains how the new European regulations could only result in a larger market share for Hollywood. Since the six countries' commercial policies were to be standardised, the Franco-American agreements limiting the entry of American films to 120 per year would become obsolete. Both Germany and Italy imported over 200 of such films per year. The averaging of these figures would lead to an increase of about 60 to 80 films per year according to *Mise au point*. A third article mentions the disastrous social impact the Common Market would have on studios and film laboratories. Given both the economic superiority of Germany and the technical backwardness (sic) of French film equipment, there is no doubt that producers would prefer to use the best available. The contradictions of part of the Communist allegations become apparent when the writer, who regrets that 'American capital would benefit Germany by setting up new studios and laboratories surpassing [the French ones], in efficiency and quality, which then make

⁸ See appendice 7, pp. 367-68.

⁹ In his professional biography, Louis Daquin evokes the campaigns for the defence of French cinema: 'Among all those who took part in the struggle — they were many and illustrious participants — I'll mention only three, who are no longer with us: Jean Grémillon, who then was president of the *Syndicat des Techniciens*, Gérard Philipe and a studio paint worker, who became a union activist and then secretary general of the *Fédération du Spectacle*, Charles Chézeau', Louis Daquin, *Le Cinéma, notre métier* (Paris: Éditions d'aujourd'hui, 1978 [1960]), p. 71.

unemployment in the latter inevitable', seems to imply that American investments would be beneficial to the French industry too. The fourth article deals with the *Loi d'Aide*: 'The treaty means the end of *'l'Aide au cinéma'*. The taxes are incompatible with article 92 of the EEC treaty since funds given by member States to help particular sectors might go against free competition. What is at stake is the very existence of the *Loi d'Aide*. This law had been first voted in 1948 and renewed in 1953 when it took the name of *Fonds de développement de l'industrie cinématographique* (development fund). By now, both the PCF and the *Fédération du Spectacle* referred to the *Loi d'Aide* as a symbol of the victory obtained by the industry as a result of the public and professional campaigns which followed the Blum-Byrnes agreements. For the Communists it was a concrete illustration of their efficiency and influence. These laws aimed at supporting the film industry proved beneficial to French producers since, as Susan Hayward makes clear, they guaranteed them the additional receipts needed to start financing new films.¹⁰ This may explain the overall consensus as to their validity and importance. Any hint that the very existence of the *Loi d'Aide* might be called into question was seen as a move against French cinema against which the PCF was prompt to react. The journalist explains that Henri Frenay, who was regarded by the PCF as the main propagandist of the Common Market within the French film industry, implicitly confirms the negative impact European standardisation might have on national productions and he quotes Frenay: 'In order for French production to keep receiving subsidies from the special fund, it is essential that Germany adopts for its own production a legislation similar to those in place in Italy and France'. The last two shorter articles evoke the possibility of a 'super-European' censorship for the first one and the 'big lie' of the '160 million big spectatorship' for the second.¹¹

The points made against the Common Market in the first issue of *Mise au point* were taken up in a series of articles published in the Communist press from June 1957 onwards.

¹⁰ See Susan Hayward, *National French Cinema* (London: Routledge, 1993), pp. 45-48.

¹¹ 'Censure européenne' mentions that Robert Bresson *Un condamné à mort s'est échappé* was censored by the 'very European' Belgian Minister for Justice. 'Le bluff des 160 millions d'habitants' reminds one that French films can already enter freely the Belgian and Italian markets or even the German one in spite of a quota system, *Mise au point*, n° 1, June 1957.

While the *bulletin du cercle Charles-Chezeau* was addressed to a readership in tune with film matters, the Communist press at large, directed as it was to a wider audience, tackled the same issues in an even more political perspective. Once again, the PCF builds its argument around the question of national independence and national pride. Thus an article in *France Nouvelle* claimed the prevalence of French cinema: 'It is undeniable that French cinema, infinitely superior as it is to the production of the other countries which are part of the "European Community", would have a great deal to lose if its production was to become linked to the decisions of the Common Market, in which Germany would have the leading part.'¹² The same point was made by Marie Perrot four months later in the same Communist weekly. Quoting extensively from Yves Ciampi's argument, the president of the Film Technicians Union (*Syndicat des Techniciens du Film*), in the trade journal *Le Technicien du film*, a periodical linked to the *Fédération du Spectacle*, she expresses the same fear that 'French cinema, depersonalised, denationalised, deprived of its original qualities, plunged into European mediocrity, determined by Adenauer's and the Pope's censors to the exclusive goal of their propaganda of hatred and war, would no longer be able to resist American films set to invading our screens and those of "little Europe"'.¹³ Cold War rhetoric was obviously still in use in 1957. Germany, the Vatican, and the United States were once more portrayed as predators, now advancing in the guise of the Common Market.¹⁴ The social, industrial and aesthetic characteristics of French cinema had to be protected at all cost. As they had

¹² Claude Reval, 'Champ libre aux films américains', *France Nouvelle*, n° 600, 13-19 June 1957, p. 18.

¹³ 'The Common Market would kill the independence and the freedom of expression of our national cinema because a European production would not allow a true French expression to French films. It would take the Frenchness out of French film, so to speak.' Yves Ciampi cited by Marie Perrot, 'Un cri d'alarme', *France Nouvelle*, n° 620, 17-23 October 1957, p. 18. If one needed an extra reason to look at the *Technicien du film* as a means to find a viewpoint akin to the Communists', one only needs to look at the September 58 issue. The journal calls more or less openly for a No vote in the referendum on the new constitution. Its manager and editor-in-chief Henriette Dujarric explains how under the new rules, the president of the Republic would be entitled to take the decision to do away the *Loi d'Aide* simply by ordinance without consulting parliament. 'Each member of the film corporation has a free vote on September 28th', she adds, 'to decide whether yes or no they should let French cinema stuck in a ditch' (*dans l'ornière où il s'enlise*). 'One has a free vote', she adds, 'but think about it', Henriette Dujarric, 'Oui ou non faut-il laisser notre cinéma s'enliser?', *Le Technicien du film*, n° 42, September 1958, p. 1.

¹⁴ Earlier in the year, Fernand Grenier published a long inquiry denouncing the propagandistic use of films by the Catholic Church, *France Nouvelle*, 'I. L'Église et le cinéma', n° 580, 24-30 January 1957, p. 7; 'II. L'Église et le cinéma: Son action en France', *ibid.*, n° 581, 31 January-6 February 1957, pp. 6-7 'L'Église et le cinéma III: Que pensent et que font les communistes', *ibid.*, n° 582, 7-13 February 1957, p. 21; 'L'Église et le cinéma IV: Que pensent et que font les communistes', *ibid.*, n° 583, 14-20 February 1957.

done since the Liberation, the Communists were still defending the film industry along these parameters which for them defined the national specificity of French cinema. It would take nearly forty years to see a different Communist discourse on Europe along with a more balanced and subtle attitude towards European cinema.¹⁵ In the meantime, judging by their headlines it seems that the Communist journalists' campaign pointing to the dangers of the Common Market rose to a crescendo. Starting with Jacques Reval's 'A Free hand to American films' and Marie Perrot's 'An S.O.S', a week later *France Nouvelle* spoke of 'Death Threats over French Cinema'.¹⁶ This dramatic escalation tends to show a certain willingness on the Communists' part to launch into a campaign similar in tone if not exactly in content to that which took place ten years before. In addition, some of the participants in the previous battles for the defence of French cinema got involved in the anti-EEC campaign. For instance, Claude Autant-Lara signed a long paper in *Le Technicien du film*, where he underlined the pitfalls of the Common Market to the film trade. Stressing once again the benefits of the *Loi d'Aide*, the French director drew a parallel between present concerns and those which surrounded the earlier Washington agreements: 'We must salvage the *Loi d'Aide* or we shall face the same situation as in the years 1947-48'.¹⁷ Was the PCF and the *Fédération du Spectacle* alone in this battle? Or had it lost all credibility within the industry?

In order to answer these questions, it is necessary to go back to Marie Perrot's article. Her extensive use of Yves Ciampi's strong reservations and profound worries regarding the impact of the Common Market was not in itself a surprise given the fraternal links between the PCF and the *Fédération du Spectacle*. Less obvious were her quotes from an article signed by René Thévenet and published in *France-Film-International* on 5 September 1958 and from an article that appeared in *France-Film-International* in May 1958.¹⁸ These journals represented the point of view of the film industry's employers rather than that of the employees. In both instances, the dangers of industrial concentration and loss of

¹⁵ See chapter 7, pp. 269-271 & 298-299.

¹⁶ 'Menaces de mort sur le cinéma français', *France Nouvelle*, n° 621, 24-31 October 1957, p. 22.

¹⁷ Claude Autant-Lara, 'Sur l'autel du marché commun', *Le Technicien du spectacle*, n° 36, February 1958, pp. 1-3. This article was published in *Les Lettres françaises*, n° 707, 30 January-5 February 1958, pp. 1-7.

¹⁸ René Thévenet, 'Refuser d'entrer dans le Marché Commun', *France-Film-International*, n° 9, 10 May 1958.

independence are stressed as a possible outcome of the European film market. In this regard René Thévenet's anti-EEC pamphlet, 'Common Market versus French Cinema', published in June 1958, stands out as it shows first that the Communists and CGT unionists did not stand alone in their rejection of the Common Market and secondly that somehow it also makes clear that they had lost some of their capacity for mobilising the industry workforce.¹⁹

René Thévenet had been a regular contributor to *L'Écran français*, before becoming a well-known independent producer and a recognised expert in film matters.²⁰ It is in his latter capacity that he outlined his opposition to the Common Market. At the beginning of his paper Thévenet makes the point that after the EEC came into force on 1 January 1958, there were belated and concerned reactions from every sector of the economy. It was only in the film industry, the producer adds, that no 'official' voice was heard against 'a treaty which would lead our industry to the slaughterhouse' and 'opposed efficiently its application'. By 'official voices', Thévenet means voices from the employers. He concludes his 12-page anti-EEC diatribe hoping for a large movement within the French film industry to resist with the utmost determination its integration into the European Community. 'French cinema — everyday is a confirmation of this — does not need the Common Market in order to conquer Europe, nor does it need Little Europe to conquer the world. And if French cinema likes freely consented, amiable, fruitful and loyal alliances, it has no wish to be duped (*il ne désire nullement être cocu*)'. I have chosen these two excerpts because of their strong words, reminiscent in tone to contemporary Communist figures of speech. Indeed at first sight little opposes Thévenet's arguments and those of the Communists. Thévenet himself agrees that within the film industry, the *Fédération du Spectacle* and the Communists were the only ones who raised the issue of the Common Market. But while doing so, he points to the political dimension of their opposition as an explanation for their lack of scope and impact: 'There is the rather violent reaction of the *Fédération du Spectacle*, but since it is affiliated to the CGT(K), its

¹⁹ Thévenet, 'Marché Commun contre Cinéma français', supplement to *France-Film-International*, n° 11, 5 June 1958.

²⁰ Olivier Barrot, *L'Écran français 1943-1953* (Paris: Les Éditions françaises réunies, 1979), p. 240. Barrot tells the story that while he was putting together a table of contents of the articles published in *L'Écran français* between July 1945 and July 1949, René Thévenet was reprimanded for listing the countries in alphabetical order, thus leaving the USSR last on the list, p. 286.

response is quite suspect and in fact does a disservice to the camp of the EEC opponents, although many of the union members are acting in good faith, starting with the president of the Technicians' union Yves Ciampi'. In addition Thévenet sketches the political background of the advocates of the Common Market in Film. He makes clear that the proponents of the Common Market represent a current of opinion 'which, in a professional debate, should disqualify them as much as it should the *Fédération du Spectacle*', albeit for opposite reasons. Naming the three European musketeers, as Charles Ford nicknamed them, he underlines the 'Atlanticist' inclinations of Claude Degand, Léon Mathot and, with more emphasis, Henri Frenay, who, as president of the Federalists' European Union (*Union Européenne des Fédéralistes*), was a strong advocate of an Atlanticist Europe. Henri Frenay was then the PCF's *bête noire*, having replaced, as it were, Léon Blum in the role of the traitor of French cinema. To complete the picture, it is not surprising to see Raymond Le Bourre of *Force Ouvrière* taking side in favour of the EEC: 'The Common Market is now a reality. Instead of resisting it on political grounds, the French film industry should begin to form alliances with it and make the most of it.'²¹

The point made by René Thévenet signifies the changes which took place in the space of ten years. At the beginning of the decade, although the Cold War was raging, the PCF had the power to mobilise the film industry. In spite of the political motivations, namely the anti-American campaign, behind the Communist-led campaigns, the industry's workforce went along, protested and battled for the defence of French cinema. Ten years on, it seems that there was little active reaction within the industry although, as Thévenet's pamphlet shows, film professionals were less than happy about the Common Market. The PCF may not have been the only voice against the EEC, it was nevertheless its most prominent opponent. But it proved unable to launch and lead a truly significant campaign against the European union. Notwithstanding the fact that the Common Market was accepted almost as a *fait accompli*, and that the Algerian war was becoming the near unique French preoccupation, it is difficult not to read the poor response the PCF received within the film trade as a sign of its loss of

²¹ Raymond Le Bourre, 'La crise du cinéma français', *L'Écho du spectacle*, n° 451, December 1958.

influence, although it could also be read as a sign of the industry's apathy. The fighting spirit which had marked the early 1950s seems to have vanished and the PCF failed to attract the film industry's support in its denunciation of the Common Market. The campaign against the impact of the Common Market on French cinema featured repeatedly in the Communist press in the years 1958 and 1959. Nevertheless the campaign took a different turn after 1 June 1958.

3.3. The PCF and André Malraux's Film Policy: De Gaulle as Dictator

The return to power of Charles de Gaulle did not put an end to the PCF's opposition to the Common Market. On the contrary, it could be said that the Communist camp found new impetus for its anti-EEC campaign in the new constitution as well as in France's new leader, both of which the PCF vigorously and nearly single-handedly fought against.²² According to French Communists, de Gaulle, whose new constitution gave more power to the executive and less to the legislative, had effectively instated personal power, as the result of an illegitimate coup which was endangering democracy. The choice was not 'De Gaulle or the Communists'. The choice was between 'personal power and a democratic regime [...] To give in to the general's scheme does not mean avoiding civil war, it means, in the short term, accepting the establishment of a regime of personal dictatorship and, in the long term, encouraging the rise of fascism'.²³ On 17 July 1958, the National Conference of the Party described Gaullism as follows: 'A social and political phenomenon, Gaullism cannot be separated from the forces from which it sprang. Behind de Gaulle, there are social and political reactionary bodies, the trusts and Capitalists, colonialists and war-mongers [...] the

²² The PCF was the main opponent to the return to power of General de Gaulle. The Socialist party was divided and called for a yes vote in the September constitutional referendum. Among the Socialists who opposed the new constitution, François Mitterrand was a prominent figure. A short documentary film *Vive la République* shows shots of the massive demonstration organised by the PCF on 28 May 1958. Seen with the Communist leaders are Daladier, Pierre Mendès-France and other Republican figures, Author unknown, *Vive la République*, 1958, BNF, cote: IKM 003495.3.

²³ PCF, *Histoire du Parti communiste français [manuel]* (Paris: Éditions sociales, 1964), p. 658.

Gaullist regime is the voice of the trusts'.²⁴ Both arguments, de Gaulle as dictator and de Gaulle as the spokesperson of Capital, became a French Communist leitmotiv in the aftermath of the general's return to power. Such arguments could be found in any discussion on any topic, including matters related to the film sector.

In the Communist discourse, Charles de Gaulle, André Malraux and Antoine Pinay replaced Léon Blum as the gravediggers of French cinema. Just as the Socialist leader had purposely sacrificed the film industry to American interests, the new rulers were set to do likewise. How was de Gaulle's administration going to achieve the sell-out of the national film industry? It was still a matter of the Common Market. In spite of de Gaulle's reservation about European integration, the new regime did not challenge the Treaties of Rome. De Gaulle's depiction as the representative of large trusts and multinationals allowed the Communists to portray both the new government and the Common Market as working together against the interests of the French film industry. Marie Perrot had already underlined the risk of seeing small-scale producers who 'made French films famous abroad' suffering from the implementation of the EEC directives. The issue of low budget films versus superproductions in relation to the specificity of French cinema in an international context is one which is very much a 1990s issue in terms of the PCF's film policy.²⁵ Susan Hayward recently raised the question, somehow proving Marie Perrot right:

It is ironic that the first to benefit from EEC legislation are the multinationals and not the national industries proper, who are stuck within the structures of their respective countries. But apart from the depletion of resources away from 'truly' French products, there are other more cultural consequences, which also touch upon this concept of a truly national cinema. The free-market policy advocated by the EEC is quite capable of causing the disappearance of smaller independent production companies, enabling the stronger, major French and American companies to take over. Such a cartel could eliminate the artisanal cinema so identified as a specificity of French national cinema.²⁶

²⁴ Ibid., p. 657. The film on the 1961 Congress of the PCF already mentioned shows an extract from the opening speech made by Waldeck Rochet — who would replace Maurice Thorez in 1964 — where he declares that 'the Gaullist regime is the acute expression of the power of the trusts' and that the Party's main objective is to 'reinstate and renovate democracy'.

²⁵ See chapter 7, pp. 287-293.

²⁶ Hayward, p. 28.

In the same vein, Jacques Revaud, who wondered why the tandem Pinay-Malraux did not consult with film's industry employers, explained that the film industry is of secondary concern to both ministers: 'French film companies are not important enough to arouse the government's interest'. Why is this so? Because it is well known that 'the current presidential regime serves the interest of high industry and high finance and the companies which make up the French film industry are rather small or medium size or are secondary branches in major trusts.' Consequently, 'The film industry's bosses' opinions account for very little in the broad employers' picture.'²⁷ Therefore the independence and commercial viability of many national companies would be jeopardised with the government's approval.

As a means of protecting itself, the film industry depended on the *Loi d'Aide*, against which, as I have shown, the EEC posed a real threat according to not only the Communists but many in the film industry. Therefore as soon as the first rumours that Malraux and Pinay intended to do away with the development fund became known, there was concern from all quarters of the industry and outcry from the Communist camp. What had been exposed as a forthcoming peril a year before was now becoming real. The exception came once more from Force Ouvrière. In *L'Écho du spectacle*, Raymond Le Bourre explains that the *Loi d'Aide* had become 'a drug with which the French production injects itself to produce films without according any attention to the qualitative and quantitative needs of the country'. For the Force Ouvrière leader, 'If the "so-called National" *Fédération du Spectacle* was so intent on retaining it, it was out of political motives and in order to retain the privileges enjoyed by its members, which are so costly and detrimental to the industry as a whole.'²⁸ On the whole, the film industry closed ranks and expressed its concern to the ministers in question. The film employers were quite concerned especially since they had not been consulted by those whose charge was to come up with the reform. Ironically, the PCF and the *Fédération du Spectacle* ended up defending the industry's employers as much as its employees. For instance the *Fédération du Spectacle* supported the manifesto issued by the *Fédération*

²⁷ Jacques Revaud, 'Premières mesures gouvernementales: Pour mettre le cinéma français aux ordres', *France Nouvelle*, n° 712, 18 June 1959, p. 30.

²⁸ Raymond Le Bourre, 'La crise du cinéma français', *L'Écho du spectacle*, n° 45, 1 December 1958.

Nationale des Cinémas Français (cinema owners and managers union). M. Trichet, its president, was also unhappy with the governmental project because of the suppression of the *Loi d'Aide*.²⁹

Needless to say, laments were louder in Communist circles. The Communists within the industry published a paper entitled *Ciné-Liberté* — ‘written, edited and financed by the *Communistes du cinéma*’ —, which took its name after the 1936 *Alliance du Cinéma Indépendant*’s journal and seems to have replaced *Mise au point*.³⁰ The paper exposes in great detail the Communist arguments against the demise of the *Loi d'Aide* and the Party’s misgivings about Malraux’s policy. The above-mentioned calls for retaining the *Loi d'Aide* have already been examined and they are reiterated in the Communist journal. In April 1959, *Ciné-Liberté*’s headline read, ‘*Contre le cinéma féal*’.³¹ For a number of months, the industry knew that the *Loi d'Aide* was living its last days but did not know by what the Gaullist government would replace it. In the early months of 1959, although the reform was prepared in a less than open way — a number of film professionals complained about this secretive way to go about it —, the broad lines of the new system became known. As *Ciné-Liberté* put it, ‘M. Malraux favours the suppression of the automatism of the development fund and its replacement by a subsidy along qualitative criterion which would be granted to some “films of quality”.’³² The fear then was that since the grant would no longer be automatic, some degree of selection would become necessary, the main questions being: on the one hand who will decide whether the films under scrutiny are of sufficient quality to deserve the subsidy, and on the other, when would this decision be made, before or after the film’s completion?

When the decree was published in the *Journal officiel* on 18 June 1959 two days after its adoption and reproduced in different trade journals, the fears of the PCF analysts were

²⁹ A. Trichet, ‘Manifeste de la Fédération Nationale des Cinémas Français’, *Le Technicien du film*, n° 51, June 1959, p. 15.

³⁰ The first issue of *Ciné-Liberté* was published on 20 May 1936. Its editorial committee was composed of Henri Jeanson, Léon Moussinac and Jean Renoir. See appendice 8, pp. 369-70.

³¹ ‘*Féal*’ is translated by the Collins-Robert dictionary as ‘loyal’ or ‘trusty’, which does not fully convey the underlying sense of a master-servant relationship.

³² *Ciné-Liberté*, n° 3, April 1959.

confirmed. The 6 August 1953 *Loi d'Aide* was abolished and was due to expire on 31 December 1959, to be replaced by a *Loi de Soutien* whose main novelty was the *Avances sur recettes*. Article 7 states that 'avances sur recettes' may be granted by the Minister in charge of French cinema. These 'advances' are generally granted after the film has been made, according to the film's subject-matter, its characteristics and qualities and the conditions of production, by a commission composed of members chosen for their financial, technical and artistic competence.³³ This disposition of the new decree was greeted differently by the film profession. Some of its elements were already part of accepted practice. The 'prime à la qualité' had been established in the 1950s and was supported by film professionals who thought the idea of rewarding quality rather appealing. *Le Technicien du film* proves useful to see how the part of the profession which is closest to the *Fédération du Spectacle* reacted to the new dispositions. In March 1960, Guy Comte analysed some aspects of the *Loi de Soutien*. While he is pleased that the notion of quality is made more precise and encouraged, he is sorry to see the 'dynamic dimension of the development fund replaced by the static notion of "soutien"', blaming this on 'the sacrifices imposed by the implementation of the Common market'.³⁴ Whereas Guy Comte does not mention the possibility of the government having a say in the content of films, Henriette Dujarric warns her readers of such an eventuality: 'The auteur seems to be endowed with an authority which had been lost long ago. But those who won't understand that this satisfaction is only given to them in order to control better their ideas and the characteristics of their films ought to think again.'³⁵ Her position is closer to the Communist one as she writes of 'le fait du prince', echoing an earlier issue *Ciné-Liberté* whose headline was 'L'aide devient "le fait du prince"'.³⁶

The Communist press was indeed more negative in its analysis of the new law. The new system was deemed undemocratic and open to all kind of political manipulations. Jacques

³³ 'Décret relatif au soutien financier de l'Etat à l'Industrie Cinématographique', *Le Film français*, n° 787, 19 June 1959, p. 4.

³⁴ Guy Comte, 'Aspects de la loi de soutien', *Le Technicien du film*, n° 59, March 1960, pp. 6-7.

³⁵ Henriette Dujarric, 'Une redoutable incertitude', *Le Technicien du film*, n° 52, July-August 1959, p. 1.

³⁶ *Ciné-Liberté*, n° 2, March 1959

Revaud spoke of the substitution of a governmental selection for the automatic return of the *Loi d'Aide*. In spite of the *Fonds de soutien*'s shortcomings — it benefited good as well as mediocre films — at least it was democratic, benefiting all in the industry. The new decree itself stipulated that it was a progressive return to a situation of economic liberalism, aiming at substituting a more supple (*nuancé*) support to the absolute automatism of the 1953 law.³⁷ The journalist criticises the reform for the reason that the power to allocate grants and credits would rest solely with the government, i.e. 'Malraux with his "ministry of Propaganda"' and Antoine Pinay, the finance minister, who then would be able to control and influence the content of the films.³⁸ In the text which accompanied the new decree, two sentences in particular made the Communists react. One reads: 'To make sure, by financial means, that the genius of France shines through its films'. The other: '...productions, whose financial, technical, and artistic will have been deemed worthy of support by the Minister following recommendation by a competent commission.'³⁹ For the PCF, statements such as those smacked of authoritarianism and confirmed the likelihood of further governmental censorship. In the Party's view the new system was symptomatic of the new Gaullist administration which the Party ceaselessly described as bordering on dictatorship. The reform Malraux and Pinay put in place symbolised a policy based on censorship and '*le fait du Prince*'.

Just as the campaign against the Common Market did not develop into something more intensive and effective, the protest about the replacement of the *Loi d'Aide* by the *Loi de Soutien* did not have any practical conclusions. Surely some of the participants were reminded of their earlier engagement. Both René Clair and Claude Autant-Lara intervened publicly.⁴⁰ Many film personalities attended union meetings. A press conference held in

³⁷ 'Rapport sur le décret relatif au soutien financier de l'Etat à l'Industrie Cinématographique', *Le Film français*, n° 787, 19 June 1959, p. 3.

³⁸ Revaud, 'Par le détour de voies financières', *France Nouvelle*, n° 715, 9 July 1959, p. 28.

³⁹ 'Veiller par le détour des voies financières à ce que le génie de la France se retrouve dans les visages que lui donnent ces films', 'Rapport sur le décret relatif au soutien financier de l'Etat à l'industrie cinématographique', *Le Film Français*, n° 787, 19 June 1959, p. 3.

⁴⁰ During a speech delivered on 18 December 1958 to the Information and the Industry and Commerce ministers René Clair pleaded for the *Loi d'Aide* and asked whether French cinema could stay alive, 'Un cinéma vivant est un cinéma libre', *Le Technicien du film*, n° 46, January 1959, p. 4. 'The truth is that

January 1959 gathered 1500 technicians, actors and film workers. Claude Autant-Lara, Claude Bernard, René Clair, Gérard Philipe, Raymond Bernard, Leonide Moguy, Yves Ciampi, Denys de la Patellière voiced their concern to André Malraux and complained that the fate of French cinema was decided behind close doors.⁴¹

Remarkably this list of names does not include anyone related to the New Wave. The two years which followed both the attachment of the *Centre National du Cinéma* to the ministry of Cultural Affairs (3 February 1959) and the creation of the *Loi de Soutien* were not marked by any particular conflict or campaign in the film industry. Judging by the *Technicien du film*, concern about the health of the French film industry remained a permanent feature.⁴² What seems to have taken more and more importance is the criticism of the New Wave directors by the 'elders'. A number of editorials and articles denounced the methods and the amateurism of the young generation. While Henriette Dujarric's initial comments were courteous, the tone became more and more aggressive.⁴³ Many in the industry felt threatened by the arrival of young directors who did not play by the rules. What was at stake then were those very rules the film unions had established throughout the 1950s, mostly under the aegis of the *Fédération du Spectacle* and the Communists within the film trade. By 1962, Renaud de Jouvenel wrote of 'the agony of French cinema', blaming the Common Market, the change of the laws regulating and the poor quality of French cinema.⁴⁴

The Communists considered the Common Market and de Gaulle's return to power as prejudicial to the well-being of the film industry. The campaign against the EEC reproduced the by now familiar nationalistic line of argument. French production was by far the best in Europe and consequently could only lose out within a supranational structure. Moreover, as

French cinema has been condemned to death by the non-renewal of the *Loi d'Aide*', Claude Autant-Lara, 'Cet infirme qu'est le cinéma français ne peut pas, ne doit pas disparaître', *ibid.*, n° 47, February 1959, pp. 1-4.

⁴¹ *Le Technicien du film*, n° 47, February 1959, pp. 1-4.

⁴² Fédération Nationale du Spectacle, 'La véritable situation du cinéma français sur le plan de la production', *Le Technicien du film*, n° 85, July-August 1962, pp. 1-3.

⁴³ Henriette Dujarric, 'Appel aux jeunes', *Le Technicien du film*, n° 44, November 1958, p. 1; 'Les jeunes réalisateurs', *ibid.*, n° 50, May 1959, p. 1; Henriette Dujarric, Max Douy and Jacques Lemare, 'La lutte contre l'amateurisme est ouverte', *ibid.*, n° 54, October 1959, pp. 8-9; Jean Dréville, 'Salades de saison', *ibid.*, n° 61, May 1960, pp. 4-6; Renaud de Jouvenel, 'Les moutons de Panurge', *ibid.*, n° 64, September 1960, pp. 4-5; De Jouvenel, 'L'ambition de créer', *ibid.*, n° 78, December 1961, p. 1.

⁴⁴ De Jouvenel, 'L'agonie du cinéma français', *Le Technicien du film*, n° 79, January 1962, pp. 2-3.

the EEC had received the approval of the White House, it meant that American production was bound to benefit from the implementation of the new European regulations. Following de Gaulle's return to power, the multinationals and the trusts were ruling the country's economy and could not find a better framework than the Common Market. Fighting de Gaulle's economic policy which, so the Communists said, favoured the trusts, the PCF became the champion of the industry's employers, i.e. private companies, as well as the champion of the industry's employees. This was a long call from the policies it favoured twelve years before when it advocated nationalising the industry. In addition, by replacing the hard-won *loi d'aide* and development fund by the new *avances sur recettes* the new regime proved its authoritarian character since it meant selecting projects before they were filmed. Both the denunciation of the effects of the Common market and the suppression of the *Loi d'Aide* triggered a wave of concern and protest in the French film industry which was relayed by the PCF and the *Fédération du Spectacle* but which did not reach the intensity of the campaign against the Blum-Byrnes agreements.

For reasons both external to the film industry — namely the Algerian War — and internal — the arrival of the New Wave — the Communist press devoted less coverage to film matters, although Fernand Grenier's interventions in the National Assembly still feared the death of the film industry. One reason for this might be the way the New Wave provoked an unexpected split between the Communists who were working in the film industry and the Communist critics. This point is taken further in the next chapter which deals with the reception of the New Wave among Communist critics.

Chapter 4: The New Republic: Critical Reception

The 1959 Cannes Film Festival is customarily regarded as a landmark not only in French cinema but also in world cinema as it marked the public birth of the New Wave. This fourth chapter will look at the way Communist critics welcomed the stream of new and mostly young film directors who took centre stage between 1958 and 1962, the four years which commonly define the period of the New Wave. How did Sadoul and his colleagues react to this new blood revitalising French cinema? In order to answer this question, one needs to look at the following points. Firstly, for critics who, for most of the decade, stuck to their credo of ‘content over style’, the stylistic novelty that informed the most characteristic of the new films must have come as a shock. Did the card-carrying critics show the same contempt for form that they had displayed heretofore? Secondly, and related to the first point, in technical terms, it is well known that a number of New Wave directors broke away from the established rules that governed film-making in France. Given that these rules had been designed, and were still enforced, by the *Fédération du Spectacle CGT*, what was the Communist response to the young directors’ emancipatory move? Last but not least, the lack of political awareness shown by the New Wave has often been noted. Was this point taken up by Communist film critics, of whom one would expect a natural alertness regarding such matters? Finally the subsequent reactions provoked by the Communist reception of the New Wave will be examined as they illustrate a debate which went beyond the realm of the reel. These are the questions I will now address.

4.1. A New Critical Discourse

The Communist critical discourse examined in the previous chapter — New Realism, priority of content over style — remained valid for most of the 1950s. Yet towards the end of the decade, film reviews in the Communist press reveal a change of attitude. Gradual as it may seem, this change was nevertheless the expression of a reappraisal of the position they had adopted over the previous ten years. As we shall see, Georges Sadoul, who was 55 in 1959, along with a handful of new names in Communist film criticism — Michel Capdenac (30), Samuel Lachize (34), Albert Cervoni (31), and Marcel Martin (33) — began to relinquish some of the most dogmatic principles in operation during the Cold War.

In two articles written in the early months of 1958, Sadoul voiced his concern at the decline in the quality of French film production: ‘Notwithstanding René Clair’s *Porte des Lilas*, French directors — whether excellent, good, or simply worthy — have shown in their latest production a decline in their content as well as in their form’, he wrote, singling out Cayatte’s *Œil pour œil* and Clouzot’s *Les Espions*. What characterised the previous film season and was lacking in the current one, according to Sadoul, was ‘a certain audacity in the depiction of contemporary social issues’. He nevertheless praised the way in which two films tackled the colonial question, Marcel Camus’s *Mort en fraude* and Claude Bernard-Aubert’s *Patrouille de choc* which were ‘courageous and justifiable denunciations of the war that had been waged for ten years in Vietnam’.¹ He found three first films to be especially promising: Norbert Carbonnaux’s *Courte tête* (‘a renewal of French comedy’), Roger Vadim’s *Et Dieu créa la femme* (‘a young director with a strong personality’) and Louis Malle’s *Ascenseur pour l’échafaud*, which augured well for 1958. Many films were eagerly anticipated: Jacques Tati’s *Mon Oncle*, Jean-Paul Le Chanois’s *Les Misérables* and Alexandre Astruc’s *Une Vie*. After mentioning the ‘exceptional vitality of the French documentary school’ and that ‘young talented directors in their twenties were busy shooting their first films’, Sadoul concluded on a hopeful note: ‘We should therefore hope that the current weakness of French

¹ Georges Sadoul, ‘Depuis octobre, le cinéma français connaît une crise’, February 1958, Paris, Bibliothèque du Film et de l’Image, Fonds Sadoul, GS-A 138.

cinema will be short-lived and that our production will soon prove that it has lost nothing of its strength and courage.’²

At the end of 1958 Sadoul was satisfied that the new generation was bringing about an improvement in French cinema: ‘As far as film art is concerned, the last semester of 1958 has been beneficial to French cinema.’³ Sadoul singles out three major works: Marcel Carné’s *Les Tricheurs*, Alexandre Astruc’s *Une Vie* and Louis Malle’s *Les Amants*.⁴ It is symptomatic that his selection encompassed the old as well as the new generation: for Sadoul, the new generation was and would be part of a national heritage. It was not a spontaneous and rootless formation. Communist critics of art, literature, and film always tend to anchor novelty within tradition. It is part and parcel of the Marxist view of History as on-going progressive process. Their attitude towards the New Wave proved no different. Sadoul’s reception of *Les Amants* exemplifies both the continuity — in terms of setting new art within the national heritage — and the change of tone of Communist criticism:

Some have spoken of eroticism or even pornography with regard to certain scenes of *Les Amants*, which are no more obscene or naughty than Rodin’s *Kiss* or Tintoretto’s *Mars and Venus*. French artists, whether it be in literature, in painting or in sculpture have been dealing with physical love for a very long time. In other countries with other customs, the film might cause a scandal. Whatever one’s opinion about the film, it does bear the hallmarks of its director’s strong personality: Louis Malle is now among the best French film-makers.⁵

What happened to the prudery displayed during the Cold War era, where the brief shot of a Hollywood breast was enough to prove the decadence of the American regime? Not only was frank portrayal of physical love now acceptable, it was, and had always been, a French

² Sadoul, ‘Le cinéma français a-t-il perdu courage ?’, BIFI, F. Sadoul, GS-A 137.

³ Sadoul, ‘Sur le plan de l’art, le dernier semestre 1958 a été bénéfique pour le cinéma français’, Paris, December 1958, BIFI, F. Sadoul, GS-A 147.

⁴ It should be said that *Les Tricheurs* depicts the idle lives of wealthy youth in 1958 France. The film’s subject-matter was therefore contemporary and bore similarities with the subject-matter of several films made by the new generation.

⁵ Sadoul, ‘Sur le plan de l’art...’ While Sadoul was now more tolerant, it is worth noting that Force Ouvrière’s Raymond le Bourre strongly objected to *Les Amants*, *En Cas de malheur* and *Les Tricheurs* which he found ‘all the more pernicious as they are destined for a popular and familial public’ and ‘very damaging to our youth and France’s prestige abroad’, Raymond le Bourre, *Carrefour*, 18 January 1959, in Jean Pivasset, *Essai sur la signification politique du cinéma ; l’exemple français, de la libération aux événements de Mai 1968* (Paris: Cujas, 1971), p. 210.

speciality, and French artists had never had any qualms about portraying physical love. For Sadoul, only foreigners might feel disturbed by what is essentially a French way of relating to the world. Though the reaction to *Les Amants* might seem to provide a trivial illustration of the change that was taking place within Communist criticism, it is nevertheless a revealing example. In the same review of the 1958 season, Sadoul also reacted positively to Chris Marker's *Lettre de Sibérie*. This was another instance of the deStalinisation of French Communist critical discourse. Despite its parodic overtones, in which Soviet and American propaganda are ridiculed, Marker's short was defended by Sadoul: 'Whether this *Letter from Siberia* and its funny frame of mind appeals to you or not, Chris Marker's sincere honesty and original talent cannot be denied'. Self-irony has never been the PCF's forte and humour was conspicuously absent from Communist writings in the 1950s (when it was funny, it was not meant to be). Sadoul's endorsement of Marker's serious mischievousness was a welcome addition to Communist criticism. By the end of 1958, Sadoul was looking forward to the new generation of film-makers who 'are making their mark through courageous and powerful films'.⁶

The 1959 Cannes Film Festival was to show that, following Sadoul, Communist critics were approaching film criticism in a more open-minded way than they ever had before. The two most talked about films of the festival were François Truffaut's *Les Quatre Cents Coups* and Alain Resnais's *Hiroshima mon amour*. Both films were well received in the Communist press, with a marked preference for the latter. Truffaut's first film was 'sincere and made with conviction', but Georges Sadoul in *Les Lettres françaises*, Samuel Lachize in *L'Humanité* and Albert Cervoni, another young Communist critic from Marseilles, whose arrival in the PCF's weekly *France Nouvelle* coincided with the birth of the New Wave, all commented that the film was not denouncing French society.⁷ In other words, in spite of Truffaut's homage to Jean Vigo, *Les Quatre Cents Coups* did not have the political and social dimension that Vigo's films had. Notwithstanding these insufficiencies, which ten

⁶ Sadoul, 'Sur le plan de l'art, le dernier semestre 1958 a été bénéfique pour le cinéma français'.

⁷ The film was also criticised for its attack on '*l'école laïque*', (the state primary school system). Samuel Lachize went as far as suggesting that it was the reason why the Catholic Film Office gave *Les Quatre Cents Coups* its prize, 'Le temps cruel de l'adolescence', *L'Humanité*, 5 June 1959.

years before would have earned it and its director public Communist scorn, the film was nevertheless praised for 'its sense of the real, its immediate authenticity, its truth, as well as for its youth'. Albert Cervoni makes this very clear from the outset: 'If one has to make a choice, there is no hesitation. Between Duvivier and Chabrol, between Jeanson and Truffaut, one chooses Chabrol and Truffaut.' Indicative of the changes in Communist criticism, he even claims that Truffaut did not go far enough in what Bazin considered a quintessential film quality, ambiguity: 'When I spoke of ambiguity, I did not mean it as a reproach, far from it. I meant it as a celebration of the main merit of a film which does not resort to the dishonest clear-cut structure of a spectacular demonstration.'⁸ While Truffaut is no Vigo — which, for Cervoni, is a pity — he is no Cayatte either, which is commendable.

As could be expected, Resnais's first long feature film brought about a livelier debate. While the atmosphere and the tone had changed, there still existed severe taboos, and not only in Communist circles.⁹ The obvious reservations many critics had regarding *Hiroshima mon amour*, centred on the Nevers episode, where at the liberation of the town, the mob shaves the young woman's head as punishment for having fallen in love with a German soldier. This and the parallel Resnais and Duras draw between the young girl's personal tragedy and that of Hiroshima was difficult for many Communist critics to swallow. For them, the slightest tarnishing of the Resistance was regarded as an act of treason. *L'Humanité* published contradictory reviews, a rare occurrence. Samuel Lachize, a young critic with the Communist daily, praised the film to the skies: 'it is a film against war and a film for love', while Armand Monjo, an old hand who had embraced the Cold War rhetoric, rejected the film: 'Of course, there is nothing scandalous in showing a French woman in love with a German or a Japanese man. But to set Nevers's tragedy within the scoria of the Liberation (shaven women), is a scandal that can only appeal to yesterday's collaborationists and admirers of Pétain; and it is a low trick unworthy of the powerful human cry with which

⁸Albert Cervoni, 'Les 400 coups... Une vérité qui n'est pas sans limite', *France Nouvelle*, n° 716, 16 July 1959, pp. 28-29.

⁹ *La Croix*, the Catholic daily, approved the decision of the Centrale catholique du cinéma (Catholic Film Office) to classify *Hiroshima mon amour*, 4B — not recommended. *La Croix*, 24 June 1959.

the film begins.’¹⁰ Sadoul’s own opinion falls between the views of the two critics. He too has reservations about the validity of the Nevers episode but they are not strong enough to deny Resnais’s talent: ‘This film is spellbinding. The *mise en scène* of *Hiroshima mon amour* is a marvel. Alain Resnais is a great director, one of the best directors of our time. *Hiroshima* has given me no end of enjoyment. But the more I remember this unforgettable film, the more uneasy I feel about Marguerite Duras’s scenario.’¹¹ There are two ways to look at Sadoul’s point of view. Marguerite Duras, who had been a member of the PCF, left soon after the Liberation mainly because of the Stalinist line the Party was adopting. The difficulty with which Party members relate to ex-Communists is well-known. The process is a highly emotional and affective one in which the defector is treated with contempt and utter disgust; it went on until the very end of the 20th century. In the case under scrutiny, Duras might have been experiencing some of that phenomenon. Another way to look at it would be to see how Sadoul, for once, seems to dissociate form and content. While he disagrees strongly with part of the story, he nevertheless places Resnais in the pantheon of great French directors. This is quite a departure from what was common practice only three years before.¹² Albert Cervoni, is also a fervent admirer of Alain Resnais. ‘Resnais’, he writes, ‘is the only one among the young authors who looks at the world with a sharp critical eye, who is not at peace with himself, who never forgets his own responsibility and ours. This is why he is the only one of the young authors of whom one can say he is a genius, as Truffaut said himself. [Resnais] is the only one who uses cinema not as a merely clever illustration of an event but as a truly new form of thought.’¹³ Cervoni rejected both Monjo’s objection to the Nevers episode, explaining how this was in fact a blatant condemnation of the hypocrisy of

¹⁰ ‘Le film le plus discuté de l’année divise aussi nos critiques’, *L’Humanité*, 13 June 1959. It should be noted that Claude Mauriac was also disturbed by the juxtaposition of the two tragedies when he first reviewed the film, *Le Figaro littéraire* [date to be checked]. After having second thoughts he fully supported Resnais’s picture, ‘Un film à revoir: *Hiroshima mon amour* ou la dialectique de l’amour et l’oubli’, *Le Figaro littéraire*, 20 June 1959.

¹¹ Sadoul, ‘L’univers et la rosée’, *Les Lettres françaises*, 18 June 1959, p. 6.

¹² See, for instance how Sadoul savaged Max Ophüls’ *Lola Montès* in 1956. ‘Nous faisons pleine lumière au cinéma. Pour ou contre *Lola Montès*’, ‘Faut-il admirer Caroline chérie’, *Les Lettres françaises*, n° 603, 19-25 January 1956, pp 1 & 6. In the same issue, Jacques Doniol-Valcroze defended the film, ‘Vendre l’homme devant l’homme’, pp 1 & 6.

¹³ Cervoni, ‘*Les Quatre Cents Coups*... Une vérité qui n’est pas sans limite’, pp. 28-29

the bourgeoisie, and Sadoul's criticism of Marguerite Duras's scenario. For Cervoni, the harmony between Duras's text and Resnais's cinematography is complete, the film is a total unity. To separate Duras and Resnais, as Sadoul did, goes against the film itself where words, shots and montage are intricately and intimately connected.¹⁴ With Cervoni wishing that Truffaut had gone further in terms of ambiguity in *Les Quatre Cents Coups* and Sadoul praising Resnais's *mise en scène*, the Communist critics adopted a critical discourse which brought them closer to André Bazin's than they had ever been. Further evidence of this is found in two critical pieces by both Albert Cervoni and Georges Sadoul.

An emblematic example of the evolution of Communist discourse on the form/content debate, Albert Cervoni's reappraisal of Orson Welles's output and place in the world film culture was published six months after the 1959 Cannes Film Festival.¹⁵ According to Cervoni, Orson Welles, 'Broadway's Hugo' as he calls him when referring to his theatre début, brings to American culture, with which he is very much in tune, an 'extra-American dimension' as can be witnessed in the director's 'refinement and openness to social issues'. *Citizen Kane* will remain as 'a monument of the Seventh Art', *The Magnificent Ambersons* reached a 'Balzacian density', and *Touch of Evil* was a 'moralist's film', exposing the dark reality of America to which Welles opposed his 'passionate liberalism, albeit with a shade of idealism'. Cervoni also applauded the American film-maker's contribution in terms of *mise-en-scène*, pointing to his use of depth of field, his sense of framing, lighting and his expressionism.¹⁶ It is as if Cervoni had just discovered Bazin's writings on Orson Welles and found some value in them.

As was shown in the previous chapter, Georges Sadoul had been at his most vociferous during the Cold War period. He seemed now more open and much less dogmatic. Where film history and politics were at stake, Sadoul proved more confrontational than in the debate around film aesthetics. This might be indicative of Sadoul's own difficulty with issues of

¹⁴ Cervoni, 'Les points sur les "i" de *Hiroshima mon amour*', *France Nouvelle*, n° 714, 2 July 1959, pp. 28-29. See also, 'Avis divergents de nos lecteurs sur *Hiroshima mon amour*', *ibid.*, n° 715, 9 July 1959, p. 29.

¹⁵ Cervoni, 'Citizen Welles', *France Nouvelle*, n° 735, 26 November 1959, p. 24-25.

¹⁶ A far cry from Daquin's disparaging remarks ten years before, see chapter 2, p. 106.

film theory as well as his recognition that some of the positions he defended might not have been totally adequate. Georges Sadoul might have been aware that the views of Bazin and his followers on film aesthetics had some merits. Yet for a loyal party-member immersed in Cold War rhetoric, the time was not one for consensus but for strife. During the Cold War, the different intellectual trends which had made up the fragile concord of the post-war period came apart. Personalists, to whom Bazin was very close through his contributions to *Esprit*, and Existentialists were becoming the enemies of the Communists and came to be the butt of the latter's aggression. Such a situation dragged on for a few years after Stalin's death in 1953. André Bazin died in November 1958. The same month, Sadoul wrote ecstatic lines about Bazin's latest opus, the first of the four volumes of his collected essays entitled *What is cinema?* In this unpublished text, he declares his admiration for Bazin while at the same time engaging in a kind of self-criticism. According to Sadoul, Bazin's approach to film criticism was generous, open to contradiction, inspiring:

There is nothing more alive than these pages. They always give their reader food for thought. [...] One is dead, really dead, when one's voice cannot find an echo or when one's voice is transformed into empty and meaningless incantations or is frozen into sterile and fossilised, not to say distorting and absurd, formulas. [...] Bazin's mind refused patterns that were as heavy and ponderous as an oak stake. His nomadic reflections were rather like reeds. Whoever engaged in a discussion with Bazin could see him bow under tempestuous arguments. Bazin stood his ground firmly, bowed yet never broke. [...] A series of principles may be drawn from Bazin's just vehemence and any film critic and any film historian would be well inspired to take them up, inspired as they are by life itself and not by fossilised dogmatic considerations.¹⁷

Did Sadoul realise that he had been adopting such 'patterns that were as heavy and ponderous as an oak stake'?¹⁸ When he called 'imbeciles' those who were unable to appreciate Bazin's prose, whom did he have in mind, the team of *Positif* or also people closer to his own circle? There is little doubt from the above passage that Sadoul was acknowledging Bazin's

¹⁷ ...*L'esprit de Bazin refusait les schémas pesants et massifs comme des pieux de chêne. Elles étaient plutôt roseaux ses pensées mouvantes...*, Georges Sadoul, 'André Bazin', November 1958, BIFI, Fonds Sadoul, GS-A 143.

¹⁸ In André Téchiné's *Les Roseaux sauvages* (1995) set during the Algerian War, the Communist school teacher is associated with the Oak of La Fontaine's fable, *Le Chêne et le roseau*. Dogmatic in her positions, she breaks down. Her daughter, who belongs to the Communist Youth, is more open-minded and flirts with the 'enemy'; she belongs to the reeds.

superiority as a film theorist, while at the same time reflecting on his own mistakes. In other words, the Communist film historian was admitting that he and his colleagues had gone astray, betraying the ethics of film criticism. A different, shorter version of this text, which does not contain the references to the oak and the reed was published two months later.¹⁹ Written in 1958, Sadoul's text shows that he was anxious to leave behind him the Cold War rhetoric which he had obviously become weary of. It seems that the New Wave gave Sadoul the opportunity to revamp his critical discourse.

A readjustment of the Communist discourse on form was therefore apparent in the critics' reviews. Did it affect their strong views on the preeminence of social content over form. It is well established today that in their immense majority the New Wave directors did not go out of their way to tackle social and political issues. There was little trace of any serious political commitment in their films, let alone left-wing activism. The apolitical tendencies of the *Cahiers du Cinéma* group are well documented.²⁰ For instance, throughout the 1950s François Truffaut made a point of not getting involved in any of the left-wing battles that were taking place at the time.²¹ In France to be apolitical amounts more or less to placing oneself at the right of the political spectrum. Given the bitterness and strong words which coloured many a controversy between the Communists and the non-Communists, since at least Autumn 1947, one expected that the new directors' lack of political commitment would be noticed by the Party's critics who then would express some clear disappointment.

Yet the overall apolitical nature of the New Wave production doesn't seem to have proved an obstacle to the PCF's critics' praises. Here and there they question the social dimension of the new films. Sadoul reviewing Louis Malle's *Les Amants* agrees that 'social critique is not the main objective of this great poem'.²² Samuel Lachize, who finds *A Bout de souffle* attractive, regrets that its subject matter leaves him more or less indifferent although the film's direction is full of qualities' and Michel Capdenac wishes that 'the young directors' flair be

¹⁹ Sadoul, 'Livres de cinéma', *Les Lettres françaises*, n° 757, January 1959, p. 7.

²⁰ Antoine de Baecque, *Cahiers du cinéma, histoire d'une revue — vol. 1. A l'assaut du cinéma* (Paris: Cahiers du cinéma, 1995), pp. 169-179.

²¹ Ibid., pp. 169-172.

²² Sadoul, 'Enfin un film d'amour', *Les Lettres françaises*, 13 November 1958, p. 6.

applied to nobler causes'.²³ Sadoul does his best to play down their non-involvement: 'One should not limit the [young directors'] contribution simply to their search for new film art-forms. Their 'aestheticism' or 'formalism' is less significant than one might have thought. Social concern is not absent from their films, far from it.'²⁴ Sadoul must have felt that he was somehow stretching the truth, otherwise why would he conclude by asking whether the work of these film-makers would remain socially conscious in the future. Whatever his own contradictions, the answer to his question is well-known: the young generation had not made social issues central to their work until the mid-1960s. Yet, generally speaking, Communist critics are careful not to push their questioning to its logical conclusion and, other than a few individual hostile reactions, gave their approval to the new films despite their thin political consistency.²⁵ The emotional troubles and adventures of the privileged youth portrayed by many New Wave films did not unleash any class opposition. The militant demands of the New Realism with its pro-working-class discourse seemed consigned to oblivion.

This more positive attitude towards form was accompanied by the almost total abandonment of the New Realist discourse. The revelations of the 20th Congress of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union played more than a minor role in this doctrinal revision. On the one hand, they prompted an abandonment of the principles which had governed Communist practices until then, including Zhdanov's Socialist Realism. On the other, they provoked in many French intellectuals and artists a sense of disaffection and betrayal, which led many to leave or move away from the Party. A different attitude towards cultural matters, recognising the artist's free will, was necessary in order to stop this cultural haemorrhage. The correction of the Communist discourse, however, was only partial insofar as it was only the more Stalinist or Zhdanovist aspects of the doctrine which were forsaken during the early years of the Fifth Republic. One facet of New Realism was retained, a facet more readily compatible with the New Wave which I will presently examine.

²³ Lachize, *L'Humanité*, 19 September 1960.

²⁴ Sadoul, 'Nouveaux réalisateurs et nouveaux films', June 1959, BIFI, F. Sadoul, GS-A 149.

²⁵ Such as Michel Capdenac's rejection of *Les Bonnes Femmes*: 'Non, Monsieur Chabrol!', *Les Lettres françaises*, 28 April 1960, pp. 1 & 7. But the film was defended by Liliane Lurçat seven months later in *L'Humanité*. 'Du cinéma, école de psychologie et des *Bonnes femmes*', 2 November 1960.

4.2. New Wave Yes, but a *French* New Wave

Sadoul's objections to Resnais's and Truffaut's first films were minor and must not hide the warm reception the Communist press gave to the array of young directors whose productions were pouring onto French screens. Louis Malle's *Ascenseur pour l'échafaud* and *Les Amants* as well as Claude Chabrol's *Le Beau Serge* and *Les Cousins* had earlier received commendation. In fact, the whole of the new directors' film output seems to have been embraced by the Communist critics. 'The sudden eruption of new talents is a major event for French cinema', Sadoul writes in the aftermath of the 1959 Cannes Festival. He was pleased that the worrying artistic stagnation which characterised the 1947-56 years has now been overcome. 'New blood irrigates French film, transforming and renewing it despite undeniable economic difficulties. In fact, the most striking thing remains the differences of tone and temperament among these directors. They seem very remote from each other — the burning sharpness of Resnais, Chabrol's penetrating good-humour, Truffaut's harsh generosity, the confused polemics of Bernard-Aubert, the vibrant colourfulness of Camus, Baratier's refined lyricism, Franju's tender cruelties, the inspired oddities of Chris Marker, the passionate humanism of Rouch, the keen vision of Louis Malle, the individual humour of Varda, or Alexandre Astruc's delicately poised uncertainties. All the same, these film-makers seem to have in common a lyricism which is an essential feature of romanticism.'²⁶

For the reader aware of Communist rhetoric and ways of thinking, the last word of this quote, 'romanticism', which should be read 'French romanticism', indicates the permanence of the French Communist nationalistic viewpoint on artistic matters. Indeed if Socialist Realism became an unwelcome doctrine, the PCF's critical discourse nevertheless retained one of its most distinctive and long-standing characteristics: nationalism. What is at stake

²⁶ Georges Sadoul, 'Notes on a new generation', *Sight and Sound*, vol. 28, n° 3/4, Summer/Autumn 1959, pp. 111-117 and 'Nouveaux réalisateurs et nouveaux films', Coincidence or unconscious echo, de Baecque's description of New Wave actors and actresses seems directly inspired by Sadoul: 'Belmondo's blasé romanticism, Brial's twirling brilliance, Blain's persistent physical presence, Bardot's pouting lips, Léaud's anxious youthfulness, Moreau's sovereign freedom, Anna Karina's nervy boredom, Alexandra Stewart's sophisticated charm, and the ephemeral and dazzling appearances of Juliette Mayniel, Corinne Marchand or Clothilde Joano', Antoine de Baecque, *La Nouvelle Vague* (Paris: Flammarion, 1998), p. 112.

here is the inscription of the New Wave in the national tradition. Whatever the novelty brought about by the New Wave, it will come as no surprise to find Communist critics busy situating this watershed in world cinema within a French creative lineage. No sooner had the new directors taken their first steps than Sadoul coined a few labels for them: “‘The New School of Paris’”, “Generation 1960”, “Neo-romanticism”. These were carefully chosen as they echo earlier French artistic movements in literature, painting, and film. This allowed Sadoul to anchor the new film-makers in the national lineage of French cultural production. It was important for Sadoul that the New Wave should not be regarded as anomalous. In April 1959 in *Les Lettres françaises*, Sadoul defends his definitions but accepts that some may not be altogether appropriate.²⁷ In view of the fact that many of the newcomers — Kast, Kyrrou, Astruc, Malle, Bernard-Aubert — refused to be drawn into a group or a movement, Sadoul agrees to drop the term ‘Generation 1960’, but argues that they misunderstood him when he proposed the label ‘The New School of Paris.’ He did not mean it as a sect or a doctrine. ‘It referred’, he writes, ‘to the definition given by Littré: “a group of famous painters who worked in the taste of this country” (*le goût de ce pays*) and most of whom were French.’ This definition suited Roger Vadim and Georges Franju. As to his defining the newcomers as neo-romantics, Sadoul argues that realism and romanticism have never been incompatible, contrary to what Alexandre Astruc subsequently argued.²⁸ Quoting Aragon in 1935: ‘Socialist Realism or Revolutionary romanticism, two names for the same thing and this is where the Zola of *Germinal* and the Hugo of *Les Châtiments* come together.’²⁹ Sadoul compares the new generation of film-makers to the literary group of the 1830s, reminding his readers that many of them were under thirty (Gautier, Musset, Hugo) and that the others reached fame in the same years (Balzac, Lamartine, Stendhal). What links the cinema of the New Wave with the poetry of the 1830s is ‘a certain kind of lust for life, a

²⁷ Sadoul, ‘Naissance d’un néo-romantisme’, *Les Lettres françaises*, 9-15 April 1959, p. 11. In *Esprit*, Sadoul once again goes down the path of French history in order to find the sources of the new French cinema, referring to Molière, Jacques Callot, Le Tintoret, Le Nain, Le Cavalier Bernin and Georges de La Tour, ‘Quelques sources du nouveau cinéma français’, n° 6, 1 June 1960, pp. 968-978.

²⁸ ‘Sadoul speaks of romanticism. How wrong he is! Cinema is and can only be realist’, Alexandre Astruc, *Les Lettres françaises*, 9 April 1959, p. 11.

²⁹ Ibid.

liking for scandal, a certain wryness and a certain dandyism'.³⁰ This is an amazing change from the early 1950s where such terms would inevitably have been used to vilify anti-national cinema. What was once considered bourgeois libertinage had become part and parcel of what was best in French culture. In March 1960, the national angle the PCF gives to its position on artistic matters was even more apparent: 'Yet the New Wave's portraying of France, its inhabitants and its trends is no further from our best national traditions (Rousseau, Diderot, Voltaire, Stendhal or Balzac) than Zola's and Maupassant's novels were.'³¹ No wonder that Sadoul's review of Jean-Luc Godard's first long feature film bore the title: '*A bout de souffle : Quai des brumes 1960*'.³² A quarter of a century earlier a younger Sadoul had branded poetic realism as 'the French school of realism'. Fifteen years later it was New Realism which was portrayed as the only true heir of French culture during the Cold War era. Now it was the New Wave.

As I have shown, the Communist critical discourse on the New Wave was characterised by a recognition of the merits of style, an almost total abandonment of the New Realist doctrine and the continuance of a nationalistic viewpoint on culture. The overall extremely positive reception the Party's critics gave to the New Wave did not go without provoking a fair amount of hostile reaction both within the PCF itself and within French film criticism at large, the extent of which varied depending on whether the protest against this Communist response came from within or without. Yet, as I will now argue, while the consequences for film criticism would be felt most strongly once the New Wave had lost its shine, the causes and effects of the attacks against the Communist critics' positions during the four years of the New Wave bore the signs of previous and contemporary political battles and went beyond the scope of French cinema to reach the heart of French Left politics. Let us first look at the rift, albeit modest and discreet, within the Party's own ranks.

³⁰ 'It remains to be seen if for some 'cheats' an E-Type Jaguar is not equivalent to the chestnut stallions Balzac's 'lions' dreamed of.'

³¹ Georges Sadoul. 'Le cinéma français au début de 1960', Paris, March 1960, BIFI, Fonds Sadoul. GS-A 159.

³² Sadoul, *Lettres françaises*, 31 March-6 April 1960, p. 7.

4.3. New Films, New Ways of Making Films

Apparent in the stylistic novelty of many a New Wave film, the freedom with which some of their directors tackled issues of production was bound to send waves across the well-established routine of France's film-making practice. The way they refused to conform to the governing set of rules — put in place and enforced since the Liberation through the relentless activism of the film unions — triggered a hostile response from the film unions which in 1960 were still extremely powerful.³³ Any move outside the system was therefore seen as going against the interests of French film workers as a whole. Needless to say, the young directors were viewed with distrust by their older peers. Among the new directors, those who as critics had been the most critical of 1950s French cinema, namely the *Cahiers du cinéma* editorial team (Truffaut, Chabrol, Rohmer, Rivette, Godard, etc.), became the target of the older generation.

When *Le Beau Serge* came out in February 1959, Sadoul and Lachize were careful not to condone Chabrol's independence of mind while showing their appreciation of his free spirit. Lachize underlines Chabrol's 'courage' but explains that Chabrol's first long feature film 'was by no means to be set up as an example of the kind of film which could be made outside established customs'.³⁴ For Sadoul the film could be produced because 'film authorities and film unions turned a blind eye so as to allow it to be made outside legitimate and indispensable but onerous professional norms'. Yet he also supports the young directors, who 'prefer the rags of independence to the gilded livery of superproductions'.³⁵ The feeling of sympathy which filters through Sadoul's and Lachize's mild rebukes is more significant than it might appear. It marked a split between the Communist critics on the one hand and Communist film-makers and technicians on the other. Louis Daquin and Jean-Paul Le Chanois exhibited a much less tolerant attitude towards their younger peers' methods of production. Both directors who held high responsibilities in the *Fédération du Spectacle*,

³³ See Pivasset, pp. 58-59.

³⁴ Lachize, 'Une réussite (où personne n'a triché)', *L'Humanité*, 14 February 1959.

³⁵ Sadoul, 'Un jeune auteur complet', *Les Lettres françaises*, 19-25 February 1959, p. 6.

condemned the way young directors approached film-making: 'Some take advantage of the situation to jump the queue and stir up trouble in order for their film to come out quicker. Other than a few interesting artistic temperaments, watch out for the smart cookies whose individualism has led to the forsaking of union gains which could prove harmful to the whole, as well as to an insane selfishness and to an *après moi le déluge* drift'.³⁶ Let us compare how Sadoul and Daquin evoked Chabrol's famous inheritance. First Sadoul:

Chabrol and Truffaut, both still in their twenties, began their careers as members of the rather exclusive group of young critics centred on *Cahiers du Cinéma*. There they defended the '*films d'auteurs*' almost as a sacred principle. And both have now been able to make their first films with their own money — rather like those novelists and poets who publish their own work at their own expense when they can't persuade editors to accept it. This has been the case with one or two others. Louis Malle among them. But it shouldn't be deduced from this that the birth of a new film school in France has been made possible only through the generosity of rich relations, allowing young men to make pictures with an independence whose basic condition is the personal possession of forty or fifty million francs.

It was an inheritance, however, that enabled Claude Chabrol to risk all he had in the production of *Le Beau Serge*, made with a cast of unknowns. The film was successful enough to be sold to a number of foreign distributors, and also to obtain an '*aide à la qualité*' from the *Centre du Cinéma*. This gave Chabrol the necessary capital to begin work almost at once on his second production, *Les Cousins*; and the result was that this very young director saw his first two films running almost simultaneously in cinemas on the Champs Elysées.³⁷

Then this note which comes from the Communist directors' cell and was probably written by Louis Daquin:

Does it mean that all the young directors can at last express themselves? Unfortunately it does not.

It simply means that all the young people who have been waiting for an opportunity for years and who worry themselves to death because nothing comes up have been pipped at the post by some real youngsters who did find the password.

And this password, it must be said, is one's family's or one's wife's money. To which one might add money given by friends of the shooting team, who, thanks to their love of the trade, their friendship or their kindness agree to work for nothing or close to nothing.

We have seen it all before. Daddy sets up a business, or buys an interest in another one in order to find a place for his son.

³⁶ Undated, Paris, BIFI, Fonds Jean-Paul Le Chanois, 163 — B. 35.

³⁷ Sadoul, 'Notes on a new generation', pp. 111-117

We have seen it all before. In a period of crisis, it is easy to accept work for less than the current rate.³⁸

Whereas Sadoul stresses Chabrol's risk taking, while acknowledging the chance factor that helped him start his film-making career, the Communist directors' cell in which Daquin and Le Chanois were the leading voices, contemptuously portrays the young directors as spoiled rich kids, while conceding that their fortune was better spent making films than living it up. Another note from the directors' cell warns against the illusory belief in so-called marginal productions: 'While we must not look at them in a scornful or hostile way, we need to demystify them. We must denounce the illusion that they represent new methods of film-making but show them for what they are: rich kids' or smart producers' stuff.'³⁹

While Daquin and others criticised some of the young directors, they did so out of their entrenched corporatism without drifting away from the PCF's doxa. In other words, this remained a dispute among the Party's film specialists. The rift between the two groups of leftist critics was far more serious. Its origins and outcome went far beyond the boundaries of film criticism.

4.4. *Positif* versus the PCF

In January 1963, at a time when the New Wave was facing public and critical disaffection, Georges Sadoul was one of the few critics who remained supportive of the young generation. He seemed even to endorse fully their production methods: 'those who blame the New Wave for losing twenty to thirty million francs forget to mention the hundreds of millions wasted in "commercial" productions (which are not commercial or successful at all)'.⁴⁰ Moreover, in the same article Georges Sadoul showed both his heartfelt attachment and profound loyalty to the New Wave. He praised Agnès Varda's *Cléo de 5 à 7* to the skies ('a heart-rending picture'), *Vivre sa vie* is 'the best Godard film' and *Jules et Jim* illustrates 'the evolution and confirmation of Truffaut's talent'. It is precisely Georges Sadoul's deep

³⁸ Jean-Paul Le Chanois, BIFI, F. Jean-Paul Le Chanois, 163 — B. 35.

³⁹ Undated, *ibid.*

⁴⁰ Sadoul, 'Euthanasie du cinéma français', *Les Lettres françaises*, 17 January 1963, pp. 1 & 7.

commitment to the New Wave which would bring to a climax a long-lasting controversy in French left-wing criticism, the tone of which would be reminiscent of the heyday of the Cold War.

The June 1962 issue of *Positif* epitomised the divisions of French Marxist film criticism. While on the surface it vehemently denounced the Communist reception of the New Wave, the very ferocity of the criticism betrayed a much wider ideological split among French Marxists, the root of which went back to the late 1940s and whose actual dimensions go beyond French cinema. In what constitutes an absolute character assassination, Raymond Borde very harshly criticises not only Georges Sadoul's critical discourse but also the critic's personal trajectory. Borde's denunciation bears citing at some length:

[Sadoul] has sold out left-wing criticism. He has distorted the values to which we rightly adhere. He has been at the centre of an ideological confusion which is intolerable. Moreover his analyses have been so outrageous that they have left a mark on French cinema. [...]

For two years, Sadoul clung to old values like a drowning person clings to an old wooden board. Then he pounced on the New Wave like a dog on a bone. Such an unexpected and intolerable attitude may be explained by the following points:
— The New Wave was a French phenomenon and Sadoul remained brainwashed by the Party's drivel on a national art rooted in the land. In the theory debacle of the years 1958-1960, he saved a strip of fabric, the tricolour, and he was less qualified than ever to judge French cinema with a cool head.

— The New Wave was a conformist and fundamentally right-wing phenomenon. So what! [In Sadoul's view] It was a thousand times preferable to left-wing films which might have put the finger on the Party's unwillingness to change. The New Wave had the advantage of being at the antipodes of the internal conflicts of French Marxism. This is where the old tactics of Thorez's faction come to the fore: forming alliances with the Right.

— Being cinema-spectacle, the New Wave brought a diversion to political remorse, and, in a way, an alibi.

— It came at the right moment to trigger or to reflect a psychological 'modification' of Georges Sadoul himself.

And this is where one comes to the secret modifications of a pseudo-Communist. By glorifying the New Wave as 'a School of Paris', 'a Neo-Romanticism', 'a Generation 1960', Sadoul was surrendering. It is as if he was ashamed of the red flag and was coming back to the bosom of the bourgeoisie he repudiated in 1926. On the threshold of old age, he asked for forgiveness. Since the letter to the Major of Saint-Cyr, we are entitled to think that he was harbouring a guilt complex. Left to his own devices because of the failure of dogmatism, he reverts once again to the morality of the man in the street. He falls into line. He aligns himself with the bourgeois critics of *Rivarol*, *Cinéma 63*, *Cahiers du Cinéma* and *L'Express*.

Such is the man of whom I think, with neither pleasure nor hatred, that he no longer has his place among leftist critics. He has already done enough damage.⁴¹

⁴¹ While Borde considers Sadoul to have been harmful in terms of French film criticism, he also refers to the aura of respect Sadoul enjoys abroad. As the most translated French critic, Sadoul is blamed for giving a false

There are two aspects worth noting in this devastating piece on Georges Sadoul: the denunciation of Georges Sadoul as member of the PCF and of Georges Sadoul as an admirer of the New Wave. Let us examine both aspects in turn.

It is not unusual for critics to be cruel towards one another, especially in France, and those of *Positif* were especially renowned for their bad manners.⁴² Nevertheless the violence of their attacks on Sadoul and his Party colleagues seems to exceed the limits of the genre. Beyond the disagreement which inflamed and divided the Marxist critics within and without the PCF, one could perceive the everlasting scars caused by the Cold War, the revelations of the 20th Congress, the Soviet intervention in Hungary as well as the new wounds provoked within French Marxism by the Algerian War. The 1956 watershed of the 20th Congress of the Communist Party of the USSR consolidated a dissidence within French Communism which started very early in the first years that followed the end of the war. The alignment of the Party with strict Stalinist dogmas had driven many out. The Khrushchev report which proved the anti-Stalinists right together with the arrival of Russian troops in Budapest, approved by the PCF, continued to exacerbate the division among the diverse branches of French Marxism.⁴³ What Borde expresses in terms of cinema, the Marxist opponents of the French Communists do in terms of the overall Party discourse. Raymond Borde's grievances against the PCF's critics were directed at the Party's lack of a truly Marxist discourse. In *Cinéma 59*, Raymond Borde defends the existence of non-Stalinist Marxist criticism.⁴⁴ According to him, 'the notion of Marxist criticism has been too narrow until now since it only takes into account *Les Lettres françaises* and *L'Humanité* which simplify every issue according to the current dogma'. Defining the credo to which a number of critics adhered — *Positif*'s editorial team, a number of critics from *Cinéma 58*, *Les*

image of the New Wave, i.e. for making his foreign readers think that it was a cinema of the left. Here is how Borde describes their reactions when told otherwise: 'They look at you with an expression of disbelief and say: "But Sadoul is a Communist, isn't he?"'. The title of an article published in a Mexican newspaper illustrates that, in many foreign countries — especially Eastern Europe and in the Third World, Sadoul's words are gospel: 'Interview with Georges Sadoul, the Pope of film criticism' ('*Entrevista con Georges Sadoul, el Papa de la Critica Cinematographica*') in *Novedades*, Mexico, 22 June 1962, BIFI, F. Sadoul, GS-E 26.

⁴² See *La Critique de cinéma en France*, ed. by Michel Vincent and Jacques Zimmer (Paris: Ramsay, 1997), pp. 86 & 96.

⁴³ See for instance *L'Humanité*, 24 November 1956.

⁴⁴ Raymond Borde, 'Critique et marxisme vivant', *Cinéma 59*, n° 33, February 1959, pp. 104-106.

Lettres Nouvelles's Ado Kyrrou and Roger Tailleur, *La Nef*'s Edgar Morin, *La Vérité*'s Marcel Oms and Borde himself in *Les Temps Modernes* — Raymond Borde writes: 'We are of the Left. The concept was still rather vague a few months ago. Today it has got a precise meaning. We abhor man's exploitation of man, colonialism, ideological enslavement, and the so-called "sacred" values'. He then makes clear that they are atheists, inspired by the traditions of anarchism and Surrealism and that they consider film criticism to be first and foremost concerned with film content. But, denouncing Socialist Realism and 'the Stalinists' dogmatic caricature of sociology', they reserve the right to use psychoanalytical concepts in their criticism. In the famous anti-New Wave pamphlet entitled *Nouvelle Vague*, Borde makes it very clear that it is 'as a spectator and as a Communist' that he disagrees with *France Nouvelle*'s review of *Le Beau Serge*.⁴⁵ It is also as a Marxist that he asks the following questions:

Why is there not a young Communist cinema ? Franju and Bernard-Aubert belong to the Left. They make leftist films. But they are maverick directors: they work without any political or financial backing because they courageously remain faithful to their ideas. Their films are gifts presented to a passive Left. Lenin said once: 'of all the arts, I think cinema is the most important for Russia'. For the last fifteen years, we have been engulfed in colonial wars. Did the Communist Party make any films about them? It did not. An extreme-right-wing coup has rocked the Republic. Has the Communist Party contacted anyone to have a news montage made about it? Has it shown any interest in the 16 mm films shot in Algeria? It has not. It was too busy praising *Le Beau Serge*. The PCF has defended French cinema simply because it was French, without looking at its ideological dimension. It has sacrificed the essential, that is to say the reality of a leftist cinema, in order to proclaim the prosperity of our national cinema.⁴⁶

There are two main reasons for Borde's aggressiveness. On the one hand having been a member of the PCF in the post-war years,⁴⁷ he belongs, along with Edgar Morin, to the cast of ex-members of the PCF who either resigned or were expelled from the Party's ranks.⁴⁸

⁴⁵ Raymond Borde, Freddy Buache and Jean Curtelin, *Nouvelle vague* (Lyon: Serduc, 1962), p. 7.

⁴⁶ Ibid. p. 26.

⁴⁷ Raymond Borde even wrote his Law PhD on Stalin's economic thought, as Claude Beylie explains in *La Critique de cinéma en France*, p. 292.

⁴⁸ The case of Marguerite Duras has already been mentioned. This is how Georges Sadoul reviews Jean Rouch and Edgar Morin's *Chronique d'un été*: 'However questionable one might find one of its co-authors [Edgar Morin], *Chronique d'un été* remains a major film, which is bound to make its mark in film history as

On the other hand, and more significantly, France being in the throes of the Algerian war, the non-Communist Marxists did not accept the PCF's stance on this particular issue.

4.5. The Algerian War and Communist Film Criticism

One tends to forget that the New Wave took place at a time when France was at war. Over 2 500 000 young French men were called up to the colonial war which raged in Algeria, but also in Metropolitan France, between 1 November 1962 and 18 March 1962. The French Left was involved in a number of ways denouncing the conflict and calling for the end of the war. In her comprehensive study on the French Communist Party and the Algerian War, Danièle Joly gives a thorough analysis of the Party's positions as well as the position of the dissidents within the Party.⁴⁹ These dissident voices within the Party had the same misgivings about the PCF's Algerian policy as did many outside the Party. This policy consisted in the vote granting full powers to Guy Mollet in 1956, the Party's belated and lukewarm support to the deserters as well as its unwillingness to call for the independence of the Algerian people, for a long while preferring instead the slogan of 'Peace in Algeria'. Such were the main bones of contention between the PCF and the non-Communist Left. It is important to recognise how the overall debate on Algeria pervaded all elements of French society. The well-known French tradition of intellectuals' involvement in politics in periods of crisis was once again respected. Several left-wing groups were formed either to help defend deserters or inquire about the missing (*Comité Maurice Audin*)⁵⁰ and several, like the *Réseau Jeanson*,⁵¹ became fully involved with the struggle of the Algerian National

it is the beginning of something new, something important', Sadoul, 'Les chevaux de Muybridge', *Les Lettres françaises*, 26 October-1 November 1961, p. 4.

⁴⁹ Danièle Joly, *The French Communist Party and the Algerian War* (London: Macmillan, 1991), pp. 130-144.

⁵⁰ Maurice Audin was an Algerian Communist scientist arrested in 1957 by French parachutist officers and never seen again. Officially the 25-year-old Algerian was the victim of a shooting accident. A committee accusing the French officers of having torured Maurice Audin to death was established in France under the aegis of Chatenet, Dean of the Paris Faculty of law, Pierre Vidal-Naquet, Jacques Panijel, Michel Crouzet and Luc Montagnier.

⁵¹ Francis Jeanson, a leading member of the *Temps modernes* team, was one of many who engaged in serious political activism. Using methods reminiscent of the wartime Résistance movement, he animated a network of volunteer workers to give support to the Algerian *Front de Libération National*, *French Cultural*

Liberation Front (FLN). The *Appel des 121*, a petition in support of the ‘*droit à l’insoumission*’ (the right to soldiers to absent themselves without leave rather than serve in the Algerian war) launched by Dionys Mascolo, Marguerite Duras and Maurice Blanchot, was the most publicised of these different initiatives.⁵² While not a single Party member’s name appears among the signatories, a number of film critics — Robert Benayoun, Raymond Borde and Louis Seguin, all of whom were affiliated with *Positif* — signed the subversive call and were joined initially by only two film directors, Alain Resnais and Claude Sautet (Truffaut was to sign later), as well as the actress Simone Signoret.⁵³ The French Communist Party did not ask its members to sign it although it expressed its support for those who did and were facing prosecution.⁵⁴ As Danièle Joly points out ‘the PCF’s stance over Algeria confirmed the Jacobin tendency of the Party for which nationalism was the oldest and strongest tradition of the French Left’. The different citations from Borde show that it was precisely the nationalistic facet of the Communist critics’ reviews that he and *Positif*’s other signatures objected to most vehemently. Yet the last straw for the *Positif* team was the Communists’ positive reception of the New Wave as a whole, including the directors from the *Cahiers du Cinéma* group. This Algerian dimension of the debate puts us in a better position to apprehend the second aspect of the controversy.

As far as the critical reception of the New Wave is concerned what Raymond Borde and Robert Benayoun hold against Sadoul and his Party colleagues is very specific: they cannot accept that Sadoul praised Marker *and* Chabrol, Resnais *and* Truffaut, Malle *and* Godard,

Studies, ed. by Jill Forbes and Michael Kelly (Oxford: OUP, 1995), p. 133. The PCF disapproved Jeanson’s activities, see ‘Le Procès Jeanson’, *France Nouvelle*, 21 September 1960, p. 2. For a more thorough analysis see Hervé Hamon and Patrick Rothman, *Les Porteurs de valises: la résistance française à la guerre d’Algérie* (Paris: Albin Michel, 1979).

⁵² Ibid.

⁵³ François Truffaut signed *l’Appel des 121* on 13 September 1960. For the authors of Truffaut’s biography, this marked ‘the official and spectacular transition of Truffaut from the Right to the Left’ which earned him the first marks of the esteem of Benayoun, Seguin and Borde. From the *Cahiers* group only Doniol-Valcroze and Kast joined Truffaut in the signing. Yesterday’s enemies acknowledged Truffaut’s panache. Antoine de Baecque and Serge Toubiana, *François Truffaut* (Paris: Gallimard, 1996), pp. 242-245. On Truffaut’s signing of the *Appel des 121*, see also his letter to Helen Scott dated 26 September 1960, in François Truffaut, *Correspondances* (Paris: Hatier, 1988), p. 173.

⁵⁴ Sadoul, ‘A witch hunt would be fatal for French cinema’, ‘Une chasse aux “signataires” serait mortelle pour le cinéma français’, *Les Lettres françaises*, 6-12 October 1960, pp. 1 & 7; Ralite compares the Gaullist repression to a French MacCarthyism, in de Baecque, p. 124; ‘Contre la répression’, *France Nouvelle*, Wednesday 2 November 1960, p. 2.

since they consider that a clear line separates the *Cahiers* group from the others. The line of demarcation between these different directors was drawn along political lines. In the article already mentioned where Borde defines the brand of Marxist criticism he and others adhere to, he also judges that the *Cahiers du Cinéma* are ‘profoundly conservative’ and can be linked to ‘a spiritualist brand of criticism with which it shares, implicitly or explicitly, a hostility towards social films’. This was written in 1959 ; four years later Truffaut, Chabrol, Godard, Rohmer, and Doniol-Valcroze had produced a number of films, none of which received whole-hearted support in *Positif*, while many met with devastating reviews. In 1962 *Positif* put forth its conclusions loud and clear: the New Wave as a whole had produced a right-wing bourgeois cinema leaving few directors worthy of the journal’s backing (Resnais, Marker, Varda, Bonnardot, Franju, Gatti).⁵⁵ Alongside the public execution of Sadoul, *Positif* published a long study of André Bazin’s heritage by Gérard Gozlan. As could be expected, the portrait is far from flattering.⁵⁶ Accused of bourgeois idealism of the most insipid kind and of conservatism, Bazin is designated the forefather of Sadoul: ‘Bazin was one of those who unite what should be kept apart. And his heir today is Georges Sadoul. Instead of looking for contradictions, of setting up oppositions, Sadoul contributes to the levelling of everything’.⁵⁷ In short, for *Positif*, ‘left-wing criticism, Communist included, has become — through its decomposition, its degradation, its lack of culture and rigour — humanist, liberal, moralising and, above everything else, its critics have become scroungers since they are reduced to asking bourgeois films to provide less individualistic solutions and happier perspectives’. There is little doubt that the Algerian war also played a part in the fierce enterprise of demolition orchestrated by *Positif*. Antoine de Baecque points to the fact that the Algerian war was mentioned only once in the *Cahiers du Cinema*, when Chabrol and Bitsch were mobilised, and stresses that the decolonisation or politics at large were neither tackled nor discussed in the *Cahiers du Cinéma* in the 1950s. None of the journal’s regular writers before 1961 signed any of the numerous petitions

⁵⁵ Robert Benayoun, ‘Le roi est nu’, *Positif*, n° 46, June 1962, pp. 1-14.

⁵⁶ Gérard Gozlan, ‘Les délices de l’ambiguïté (éloge d’André Bazin)’, *Positif*, n° 46, June 1962, pp. 39-69.

⁵⁷ Gozlan, ‘Éloge d’André Bazin (suite et fin)’, *Positif*, n° 47, July 1962, pp. 16-61.

dealing with a number of issues such as the Budapest uprising, the status of Algeria or the conscripts' rights to insubordination. On the other hand *Positif's* editorial team were always more in touch with contemporary politics and more than once attacked the other camp for their lack of a political consciousness. The controversy among the French Marxist Left reached its peak in 1962 and thus may be regarded as the natural outcome of a long-lasting political battle rather than simply a sign of things to come as Jacques Zimmer claims.⁵⁸

Jacques Zimmer has a point though insofar as the conspicuous absence of the Algerian conflict from French screens between 1958 and 1962 raised the question of the possibility of a political cinema in France.⁵⁹ In a violently anti-Communist article, Marcel Oms regrets that the Left and in particular the PCF failed in its duty and expresses his hopes that a marginal/militant cinema will take up the case of French radical cinema.⁶⁰ This article is emblematic of the excessive and often unfair attitude of the *Positif* team. While tracing back the errors and betrayals of the French Communists since the Liberation, Oms lists a number of films deserving of praise: *La Bataille du rail*, *Au cœur de l'orage*, *Le Point du jour*, *Vivent les dockers*. While the first one, directed by René Clément had the full backing of the PCF, the remaining three were shot by Communist directors, respectively Le Chanois, Daquin, Ménégoz. He blames the PCF for the fact that not a single commercial film hinted at the miners' strike, failing to acknowledge the 1948 Communist-sponsored documentary film shot by Daquin with a young assistant named René Vautier, *La Grande Grève des mineurs*. He makes fun of Christian-Jaque's *Si tous les gars du monde* which the Communist critics defended but fails to mention Daquin's struggle with censorship over *Bel Ami*.

As for the Algerian War, again the PCF is accused of not having fulfilled its role. It is true that the PCF as a party did not get involved in the production of films against the war and in support of the struggle of the Algerian people. The ambiguity of the Communist position on Algerian independence has already been pointed out and it explains the Party's reluctance to

⁵⁸ See *La Critique de cinéma en France*, pp. 89-105.

⁵⁹ In 1990, Émile Breton disputed the view of a French cinema unaware of, or indifferent to, the Algerian War, 'Quand les plantes exotiques parlaient', *Les Lettres françaises*, n° hors-série Spécial Algérie, April 1992, pp. 21-22.

⁶⁰ Marcel Oms, 'Le grand mensonge', *Positif*, n° 47, July 1962, pp. 5-11.

lend its support to marginal productions over which it could not have full control. Yet it was a French Communist, René Vautier, who directed a number of these films — *Algérie en flammes*, *Djezaïrouna*, *J'ai huit ans* — albeit without the backing of his party.⁶¹ René Vautier, who has never left the PCF, recalls his interview with Léon Feix, the member of the Central Committee in charge of the Algerian question, before going to North Africa. Although he shows that Feix tried to talk him out of the idea, he underlines Feix's word of encouragement when faced with Vautier's obstination. 'As far as I am concerned', Vautier concludes, 'censorship did not come from French Communist quarters, let's make that clear!' René Vautier, who disagreed with Communist critics in terms of their approval of the New Wave, stresses that many Communists participated in the shooting of his films and that some were distributed through the Party network.⁶² René Vautier's membership in the PCF is not mentioned in Raymond Borde's paper, 'Le cinéma marginal et la Guerre d'Algérie', where the critic writes that 'the PCF did not prepare, back or distribute anything'.⁶³ But the director underlines this membership in a subsequent interview with Marc Kravetz to whom he explains that being a French Communist did not guarantee his security in Algeria.⁶⁴ Given its political stance there is no doubt that the PCF did not want to be seen openly sponsoring pro-FLN films. René Vautier points out that the Communist critics and the Communist press ignored his films. Who did not for that matter? Jean-Louis Bory raised this question and pleaded guilty in 1973 for not having made them known, accusing the left-wing press of having failed in its mission.⁶⁵ This is another point where *Positif* seems to go a bit far. Censorship over the Algerian question was absolute. None of the directors of the New Wave were able to make a film dealing with the war. The *Cahiers*'s directors did not. Those

⁶¹ René Vautier, *Caméra citoyenne* (Paris: Éditions Apogée, 1998), pp. 151-66.

⁶² Vautier, letter to the author dated 13 November 1996.

⁶³ According to Borde three films upheld the honour of French cinema: Philippe Durand's *S.P.* 89.098, Guy Chalon's *58-2-B* and *J'ai huit ans*, 'Le cinéma marginal et la Guerre d'Algérie', *Positif*, n° 46, June 1962, p. 15-17.

⁶⁴ Marc Kravetz, 'Entretien avec René Vautier', *Positif*, n° 50-51-52, March 1963, pp. 43-50.

⁶⁵ Jean-Louis Bory, *Questions au cinéma* (Paris: Stock, 1973), p. 163.

coming from the short film school did not either.⁶⁶ Significantly, in September 1960, Michelle Manceaux put the following question to ten directors: 'If censorship did not exist, what film would you like to make on the Algerian war?'⁶⁷ Most of them declared that they would like to make such a film and gave the outline of a possible story,⁶⁸ but René Clair answered that he much preferred to direct comedies rather than tragedies while François Truffaut explained 'that he would be unable to make a film in the heat of the moment since it would necessarily imply pleading someone's cause and that he does not know how to do'.⁶⁹ The great majority of French directors, including even the most committed, gave in and complied with France's censorship during the Algerian War.⁷⁰ René Vautier ironically underlines that Alain Resnais himself dropped his project for a film on Algeria and went to shoot statues in Germany.⁷¹ This cannot simply be attributed to the sole responsibility of the Communist Party as many in *Positif* would like their readers to believe.

Jean-Luc Godard's *Le Petit Soldat* was the only film dealing with the Algerian War shot during the conflict, albeit in Switzerland. The ambiguous nature of its subject-matter — a French deserter joins an anti-terrorist group and is tortured by FLN agents — was greeted with anger and contempt by the *Positif* team. The fact that the film was banned by the French government did not appease the critics. In fact what enraged them even more was that the film was defended by the Communists in the name of the freedom of speech.⁷² Godard seems to have attracted the most savage attacks in *Positif*. In the journal's dictionary Borde

⁶⁶ Alain Resnais, Chris Marker, Georges Franju, Agnès Varda, Henri Fabiani, Nicole Védres, Yannick Bellon, Jean Aurel, Robert Menegoz, Pierre Kast, Paul Paviot, among others.

⁶⁷ Michelle Manceaux, 'Les réalisateurs français et la Guerre d'Algérie', *L'Express*, 29 September 1960.

⁶⁸ Jacques Doniol-Valcroze, Roger Vadim, Claude Chabrol, Henri-Georges Clouzot, Philippe de Broca, Pierre Kast, Jean Valère, Alain Resnais.

⁶⁹ Truffaut gave a different kind of answer in a interview to the Communist Youth journal, *Clarté*. There he explains that in the case of Maurice Audin for instance, what would interest him is not the young Algerian but the French officers' professional as well as personal motives, what went through their minds, what led them to such extremities. 'It would therefore be necessary to examine — I'll make you jump — the *drame de conscience* of General Massu who authorised and covered up torture in Algeria', *Clarté*, n° 42, March 1962, cited in Baecque and Toubiana, p. 118.

⁷⁰ On the extent and methods of censorship see Pivasset, pp. 125-266 and *French Cultural Studies*, pp. 132-133.

⁷¹ Vautier, *Caméra citoyenne*, p. 27.

⁷² 'Le Petit soldat interdit', *Les Lettres françaises*, 15-21 September 1960, p. 1; Sadoul, 'Le Petit Soldat et la censure', *ibid.*, 29 September 1960, p. 7; Sadoul, 'L'important est de se poser des questions', *ibid.*, 3-9 November 1960, p. 7.

defines him as ‘unrepentantly wasting film and uttering the most idiotic statements’ resulting in his being ‘the most painful regression of French cinema towards intellectual illiteracy and plastic pretence’.⁷³ During the summer of 1960, after the release of *A bout de souffle*, Sadoul wrote of Godard: ‘It is not because a young director manifests some bitterness in his first picture that he will necessarily become a “fascist”. This bitterness may on the contrary be the first sign of a critical consciousness that will eventually bring him towards a real optimism. Let’s take him in his dialectical progress where a negation of bourgeois optimism might in some cases lead to a true optimism, which is not metaphysical, but revolutionary.’⁷⁴ Knowing Godard’s future career as we do now, it is interesting to see who between Sadoul and Borde had the most insight.

Positif’s attitude to Jean-Luc Godard epitomised the dogmatism of its editorial stance and principles.⁷⁵ A journalist with the *Gazette de Lausanne*, Alain Tanner sums this up very well when, while defining the *Cahiers du Cinéma* somewhere at the right end of the spectrum, he defines *Positif* as a small post-Surrealist clique whose discourse might occasionally be more appealing, yet is childishly dogmatic.⁷⁶ There was something disturbingly dictatorial in the way *Positif* approached its critique either echoing the prose of 1950s Stalinism or foreshadowing that of the 1960s Cultural Revolution.

4.6. Revisionism Revised

To use a notorious French Communist expression, the Communist assessment of the New Wave was ‘on the whole positive’ (*globalement positive*). A number of new critics came to the fore under the patronage of Sadoul who set the tone of this positive response. Interestingly given that all of them were lumped together by Borde, there was nevertheless

⁷³ ‘Dictionnaire partiel et partial d’un nouveau cinéma français’, *Positif*, n° 46, June 1962, pp. 19-38.

⁷⁴ Georges Sadoul, ‘Le cinéma et l’homme de 1960’, *Les Lettres françaises*, 18 August 1960, p. 6.

⁷⁵ See Michel Mardore’s account of *Positif*’s editorial meeting in *La Critique de cinéma en France*, p. 95.

⁷⁶ Alain Tanner, ‘Après *A bout de souffle*, une nouvelle vague pour le meilleur et pour le pire’, *Gazette de Lausanne*, 28 June 1960. Henri Agel also regrets the ‘spiritual infantilism’ with which *Positif* and in particular Bernard Chardère discussed Luis Buñuel’s *EL*, *Positif*, n° 11, September-October-November 1954, pp. 45-56, in *La Critique de cinéma en France*, p. 85.

one dissenting voice, that of Léon Moussinac, who disagreed with the majority.⁷⁷ Moussinac castigated the New Wave for showing an evident liking for perversion of which he found traces not only in films but also in some forms of advertising and a number of literary works published over the last ten years.⁷⁸ Moussinac was no longer a leading figure of French Communist criticism. Yet his remark, which echoed earlier discourse, emphasises the extent of the change among his Party's peers. More open, less dogmatic, Communist critics seem to have been able to appreciate films in a more personal manner without inevitably resorting to ready-made patterns. They did however reflect the Party's policy on the Algerian war by not calling for French cinema to raise the Algerian question in its films.⁷⁹ Following the often ludicrous excesses of the period 1947-1957, this was a welcome departure from the tiresome *langue de bois* to which readers had become accustomed. Yet one wonders whether the baby was not thrown out with the bathwater. The films of the New Wave were not socially conscious ; they did not depict the everyday life of the majority of the French people. This was commented upon in numerous articles, in particular Philippe Esnault's in *Les Lettres françaises* and the previously cited paper by Alain Tanner. According to the future Swiss director: 'One is unable to find in today's films any sense of a social consciousness, of the simple acknowledgement of the possibility of living together. [...] There is not a single valid criticism of a society with which, as the films make quite clear, most of the time the director finds himself in total disagreement. The individualism merely results in a formidable egocentrism'.⁸⁰ Philippe Esnault, whose long study is very critical of most of the new directors although in terms less excessive than those of *Positif*, underlines in the same way the discrepancy between the privileged lives portrayed in many New Wave films and that of the great majority of French youth: 'rural youth, working-class youth, students who work to

⁷⁷ '[Sadoul] has had his disciples : Armand Monjo in the past, Samuel Lachize, Marcel Martin, Michel Capdenac now, and, it would seem, Albert Cervoni', Borde, 'L'Hypothèque Sadoul', pp. 70-77.

⁷⁸ Léon Moussinac, 'Une Nouvelle Vague ?', original manuscript, Paris, Bibliothèque de l'Arsenal, Fonds Léon Moussinac, 114 (13) 4340.

⁷⁹ Georges Sadoul's review of *Octobre à Paris*, a film about the massacre of Algerian civilians by the French police in Paris in October 1961, appeared in *Les Lettres françaises*: 'Un film maudit', 13-19 September 1962, p. 6. Six months after the end of the war. Indeed *Positif*'s article about militant cinema and the Algerian war was published after the *Accords d'Évian* signed on 18 March 1962.

⁸⁰ Alain Tanner, 'Après *A bout de souffle*, une nouvelle vague pour le meilleur et pour le pire', *Gazette de Lausanne*, 28 June 1960.

study seem not to exist'. Advocating a younger, freer and more political cinema, Esnault calls for 'the renaissance of a national cinema which had been second to none and could be so again'.⁸¹ Georges Sadoul and his followers demonstrated unusual leniency towards many of the New Wave directors. This was picked up very early in Communist circles. On the agenda of the directors' cell meeting of 3 February 1959, the third item reads: 'need for a Marxist analysis of the situation of cinema in France, as well as of the means we as Communists must put forward to fight against the confusion which holds sway in the film industry... and also in our ranks'.⁸²

The *Cahiers du Cinéma* special issue on Cannes for the film festival's 50th anniversary in 1997 bears signs of Sadoul's support of the New Wave. Sadoul's article for *Les Lettres françaises* where he explains why he and Louis Marcorelles decided to organise the *Semaine de la critique* has been chosen to represent the 1963 Cannes Film Festival.⁸³ In the introduction, he is described as a man of integrity, a generous and respected critic. Published around the same time, *La Critique de cinéma en France* contains numerous sarcastic remarks about Sadoul's work.⁸⁴ Responsible for the Sadoul entry, Jacques Zimmer finds his work as a critic more debatable than his work as an historian. This shows that the divisions caused by the New Wave have not totally disappeared. In any case, the discussion within the Party as to the validity of the critics' views on the new generation demonstrates that the Communist reception to the New Wave was much more problematic than Jean-Michel Frodon's one-sided portrayal of it in *L'Âge moderne du cinéma français*. His argument may be summed up as follows: the Communist critics' position was predictably negative, or when it was not, their praise was short-lived.⁸⁵ Frodon does not differentiate between

⁸¹ Philippe Esnault, 'Une Industrie qui pourrait être un art — I. De la nécessité d'une relève', *Les Lettres françaises*, n° 816, 17-23 March 1960, pp. 1 & 7 ; 'II. La Marée montante', *ibid.*, n° 817, 24-30 March 1960, p. 10; 'III. Au-delà de la puérilité et de la désinvolture', *ibid.*, n° 818, 31 March-6 April 1960, p. 6; 'IV. Le Barrage', *ibid.*, n° 820, 14-20 April 1960, p. 6.

⁸² BIFI, F. Le Chanois, 163 — B. 35.

⁸³ While still a student in the late 1940s and early 1950s, Louis Marcorelles used to write to Georges Sadoul to express his surprise, disappointment and disagreement at some of Sadoul's positions on Russian and American films. Their working together in 1963 is another indication of both Sadoul's evolution and others' changing perception of the Communist critic. See letters dated 8 October 1948, 27 January 1950, 23 February 1950, 20 May 1950, BIFI, F. Sadoul, GS-C 206.

⁸⁴ *La Critique de cinéma en France*, pp. 84, 99 & 384-385.

⁸⁵ Jean-Michel Frodon. *L'Âge moderne du cinéma français* (Paris: Flammarion, 1995), pp. 41-42.

Communist critics and the film trade Communists' response to the New Wave. This is an example of the worrying tendency among French film critics and historians to take for granted and to offer a simplistic view of the Communist positions. In fact, the very questions the Communist critical reception of the New Wave gave rise to were to shape French Communist criticism for many years to come and in particular the way it positioned itself in 1968, as we shall see in chapter six.

In its generally agreed sense, the New Wave refers to a handful of directors and their production between 1958 and 1962. It is remembered mostly for its novelty in terms of film aesthetics, its use of new material and its production methods. What is missing from most accounts is the controversy which surrounded its appearance. Far from being welcomed unanimously by the film industry as prodigal sons, the New Wave directors' methods and aesthetics raised many questions both within the film industry and among film critics. The New Wave disturbed the cosy arrangement French cinema enjoyed throughout the 1950s. While François Truffaut might have criticised the *tradition de qualité* in aesthetic terms, the debate which surrounded the arrival of the younger generation shows that the New Wave also shook the film trade in terms of its economic and industrial organisation. In this regard the attitude of Communist film professionals and critics may be regarded as emblematic of the era. As far as the French Communists are concerned, the New Wave troubled the pre-existing community of mind between film practitioners and film analysts. In fact both the industrial and the artistic dimension of the changes brought about by the New Wave exposed the ambiguity of the Communists' film discourse regarding the means of production, the style and content issue and more generally the notion of a Marxist critique of cinema as a whole. Questions were raised, lessons had to be drawn. In the next part I will examine how the PCF responded to the challenge posed by the New Wave.

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Part III
May '68

Chapter 5: Film Policy: May '68

In 1964, during the 17th Congress of the French Communist Party, Waldeck Rochet replaced Maurice Thorez as Secretary General. As Stéphane Courtois and Marc Lazar explain in their *Histoire du Parti Communiste Français*, the change in leadership brought about a new political perspective while at the same time it ensured its continuity. Among the main transformations were the acknowledgement of the reality of the Common Market and the emphasis on achieving socialism through peaceful means. In terms of economics, the PCF conceptualised the notion of State monopoly capitalism, i.e. the notion that a capitalistic State, like France under the Gaullist government, worked hand in hand with the large financial and industrial monopolies. The PCF also called for a new alliance of the forces of the Left: 'It is now time for the regrouping of all democratic forces around a common programme.' This new policy was followed by concrete measures such as, in the 1965 presidential elections, the PCF's support for the candidature of François Mitterrand. In the 1967 general elections, the PCF obtained 22.5% of the votes (3.3% more than in 1962) and 73 seats. On February 1968, the PCF and the Fédération de la Gauche Démocratique et Socialiste (FGDS) issued a common declaration underlining the rapprochement between the two parties. At the outset of May 1968, the PCF was the most powerful component of the French Left. Its attitude during the events — its contempt for the far left, matched by the latter's vehement denunciation of the PCF's stance, and its hesitancy in joining in the revolutionary spirit of the time, which led it to choose the constitutional path of the general elections — ended with a devastating electoral defeat in June 1968. Yet in the following year, after the No victory in the referendum, which provoked de Gaulle's departure, the PCF's candidate, Jacques Duclos, obtained over 22% of the votes. In other words, the PCF managed to retain its place as the main party of the French Left. May '68 had nevertheless given rise to a strong far left movement which was to mark French political life for a number of years after the events. A constant of the French far left's numerous and divided movements was their attacks on the PCF's policy which was seen as a reformist betrayal of

the French working class. In most '*gauchiste*' publications of these years, PCF was often written P « c » F, making the point that for the far left, the Party had lost its Communist credentials. Of course a great number of the gauchiste leaders and militants had been members of the PCF who had either left the Party or been expelled from its ranks. During the 1960s, while changes were taking place within the Party, normalisation was also on the agenda. On the one hand, there were the 'Italians', named after the Italian Communist Party's tendency to distance itself from the USSR, who were accused of right-wing opportunism. On the other hand, there was the Trotskyist wing, headed by Alain Krivine who contested the support given to the 'bourgeois candidate' Mitterrand, which was accused of left-wing opportunism, as were also the Maoists. All these groups would play a major role in the May '68 events, not least in terms of their strong criticism of the PCF. As far as the cultural policy is concerned, the key date before May '68 was the 1966 Central Committee of Argenteuil, whose resolution recognised the freedom of the artist and the intellectual to choose whatever form of expression they felt appropriate.

5.1. The French Film Industry in the 1960s and the PCF's Response

By 1965, the French film industry was once again in a situation of crisis. While the 1960s were not a period of intense industrial action, there was nevertheless a feeling of anxiety within the film trade. There are a number of reasons which may explain the depression that beset the industry. Although film production figures remained more or less stable throughout the 1960s, the proportion of coproductions increased quite dramatically, and consequently the number of French films produced entirely with French money went down even more dramatically.¹ The drop was impressive compared to other European film industries, with Italy and the UK retaining a high production figure, although all countries experienced a drop

¹ Italy remained the main partner. There were 51 coproductions in 1958 and twice as many in 1965 with 108 coproductions (the highest number ever). There were 99 100%-French films in 1950, 75 in 1958, 45 in 1964, and only 34 in 1965. See film production figures in *Encyclopedia of European Cinema*, ed. by Ginette Vincendeau (London: Cassell, 1995), p. 465.

from 1964 to 1965.² But it was the decline in audience figures which proved the most worrying of all. Since 1957, which marked the all-time French film audience peak with 411.7 million spectators, the figures for film audiences had steadily declined.³ This loss in spectatorship had been somehow hidden by the coverage of the New Wave phenomenon, but by the end of 1963, the scale of the problem became apparent to everyone. In seven years, audience figures had fallen by over thirty percent. Although this seems a very high figure, the decrease was still significantly less than the German or the English one with Italy faring only slightly better than France.⁴ Like other Western European countries, France was beginning to enjoy the benefits of affluent society. In terms of film audience, ‘the thirty glorious years’ (*les trente glorieuses*), benefited cinema until 1957, but with the new Republic came new options.⁵ The steep increase in the number of cars and television sets meant that cinema-going was now facing competition as the most popular leisure activity.⁶ From 1963 onwards, the alarming headline which had been such a regular feature in the 1950s reappeared with a vengeance: ‘The crisis of French cinema’.⁷ Even the *Cahiers du cinéma* devoted their front page to the problems faced by the French film industry.⁸ The decline in film attendance continued throughout the 1960s and unemployment was high in a trade which still feared the impact the European Community might have on their work. Governmental involvement in censorship issues as well as in film bodies such as the Cinémathèque did not help to establish a climate of trust between the film industry and the Gaullist regime as it

² In 1965, Italy produced 94 films and participated in 109 coproductions (135+155 the year before), UK produced 97 in 1965 (126 in 1964), *ibid.*

³ 1959: 353.7 million of spectators; 1960: 354.7; 1961: 328.4, 1962: 311.7; 1963: 292.1; 1964: 275.8; 1965: 257.2; 1966: 234.7; 1967: 211.4; 1968: 203.2; 1969: 182.1; 1970: 184.4; 1971: 177; 1972: 184.4, *ibid.*, pp. 466-467.

⁴ France: 411.7 in 1957, 257.2 in 1965; Italy: 758.4 in 1957, 663.1 in 1965; Germany: 801 in 1957, 294 in 1965; UK: 915.2 in 1957, 326.6 in 1965, *ibid.*, p. 466.

⁵ Although thirty years is an exaggeration, *les trente glorieuses* refer to the period of sustained economic growth from the early 1950s to the 1973 oil crisis. See *French Cultural Studies*, ed. by Jill Forbes and Michael Kelly (Oxford: OUP, 1995), pp. 140-152. See also Kristin Ross, *Fast Cars, Clean Bodies, Decolonization and the Reordering of French Culture* (Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 1995).

⁶ While in 1947, there were only 3000 TV sets, by 1960 there were almost 2 million sets and around nine million in 1967, in *French Cultural Studies*, p. 146. As to the new civilisation of the car, see Ross, pp. 15-70.

⁷ Michel Etcheverry, ‘La crise du cinéma’, *La Nouvelle Critique*, n° 144, 1963, p. 65; Gérard Belloin, ‘La crise du cinéma français’, *La Nouvelle Critique*, n° 165, 1965, pp. 133-134; ‘La crise du cinéma français’. *Le Monde*, 28 March 1965; ‘La crise du cinéma français’, *Le Figaro*, 20 November 1965.

⁸ ‘Situation du cinéma français’, *Cahiers du cinéma*, n° 161-162, January 1965.

alienated not only the film industry employees but the film-makers as well. By 1968, the whole of the film industry, be it mainstream or marginal, had many reasons to protest against the regime. May '68 represented the perfect forum for this protest. How did the French Communists react to these different issues? Did the stance they adopted affect in any way their position in May '68? The present chapter will look at the French Communist views on these issues. What policy did they advocate to improve the state of the film industry? Was the PCF's position on film matters any different from the one it adopted for other industrial sectors? How did the Communists within the film trade react to the Spring events? In order to understand what happened in May '68, it is first necessary to look at some of the issues which, little by little, brought the French film world into the vast movement of May '68. I will look first at the Communist position on the new 'crisis of French cinema', then look at the issue of censorship and, closer to May '68, at its attitude towards the Cinémathèque affair. Only then will it be possible to fully appreciate the PCF's stance on the May events in relation to the film industry.

5.1.1. The Fallout of the New Wave

Although the New Wave has made a tremendous impact on world cinema and remains a key period in French film history, it should not be forgotten that its success at the time was limited and rather short-lived. While some films proved a commercial success, it is also true that many a New Wave film failed either to make a mark at the box office or simply to get a general release.⁹ Producers started to lose money following the films' failure. By 1963, the New Wave had lost most of its shine and a period of retrogression followed for many of its directors.¹⁰ The difficulties experienced by the French film industry in the mid-1960s amplified this phenomenon and widened the gap between many auteurs of the young

⁹ *Les Quatre Cents Coups*, 450 000 spectators; *Les Cousins*, 416 000; *A bout de souffle*, 380 000, but the following films were commercial failures: Kast's *La Morte Saison des amours*, Rohmer's *Le Signe du lion*, Astruc's *La Proie pour l'ombre*, Godard's *Les Carabiniers*, in René Prédal, *50 ans de cinéma français [1945-1995]* (Paris: Nathan, 1996), pp. 257-258.

¹⁰ Just two examples among well established and acclaimed New Wave directors. Chabrol went commercial (*Dr Khan* series) and Rohmer was unable to make another feature film until 1967.

generation and the rest of the film trade employees, from film directors to workers. Within the film trade, the Communists' standpoint was that of a defence of the industry, backing the *Fédération du Spectacle*'s film policy and supporting its demands.

As I have shown in the previous chapter, the New Wave's new methods of film production were not entirely welcomed by the film trade. Indeed when the young directors started to experience economic difficulties after two or three years of relative success, criticism of the new generation began to be heard more openly. In the film industry, 'amateurism' became the big insult. The young auteurs' lack of experience was seen as the main culprit, which explained both the alleged poor quality of French cinema as well as the high unemployment level in the industry. Trade journals in particular came down heavily on many of these new names, blaming them for their methods, which they said, endangered the entitlements won by the film employees since the Liberation.¹¹ The break between some Communist critics and most Communist film technicians which took place during the New Wave continued to manifest itself once the crisis began to be felt more heavily. Whereas most declarations emanating from members or sympathisers of the *Fédération du Spectacle* blamed in one way or another the New Wave, Georges Sadoul continued to lend its support to the new generation. Contrary to Daquin, Le Chanois or Bluwal, Sadoul refutes the idea that the New Wave is responsible for the present crisis:

The situation of the French film industry is far from satisfactory, as everyone knows. Let's forget the hackneyed idea that the New Wave is responsible for such a state of affairs. Both Brigitte Bardot and Godard were part of it and are now in *Le Mépris*. The New Wave directors have been criticised for not following the orthodox formula, yet *Le Mépris* attracted more spectators than *La Bonne Soupe*, *La Vie conjugale I et II*, *La Ronde*, *Chair de poule*, *L'Aîné des Ferchaux*, *Constance aux enfers*, *Cherchez l'idole* or other resolutely commercial films.¹²

¹¹ See for instance, the series of three articles entitled 'La crise de qualité', De Jouvenel, 'I. Bilan d'une saison', *Le Technicien du film*, n° 99, 15 November-15 December 1963, pp. 6-7 & 31; Jean Serres, 'II. Procès du héros de film', *ibid.*, n° 100, 15 December 1963-15 January 1964, pp. 2-3; Serres, 'III. Réalités de la censure', *ibid.*, n° 101, 15 January-15 February 1964, pp. 4-5.

¹² *La Bonne Soupe* was directed by René Thomas in 1963, *La Vie conjugale I et II* by André Cayatte in 1963, *La Ronde* by Roger Vadim in 1964, *Chair de poule* by Julien Duvivier in 1963, *L'Aîné des Ferchaux* by Jean-Pierre Melville in 1962, *Constance aux enfers* by François Villiers in 1963, *Cherchez l'idole* by Michel Boisrond in 1963. Georges Sadoul is nevertheless careful to include Daquin's economic and social explanations for the public's disaffection towards cinema in his article, without reminding his readers that Daquin or the Communist film cell did lay some of the blame for this worrying trend on the New Wave. 'Le cinéma français est-il un luxe?', *Les Lettres françaises*, n° 1062, 7-13 January 1965, pp. 1 & 10.

Sadoul also disagreed with his fellow Party-members when they blamed low-budget film for the current difficulties. Henri-Georges Clouzot once declared that low budgets killed French cinema. One of the implicit criticisms of the New Wave type of production is indeed their low budget. In corporatist terms, low budgets mean fewer people employed on a film shoot or shorter shooting time. Here as well, Sadoul thought otherwise. In an article, provocatively entitled 'Are big-budget films killing French cinema?', the Communist historian rejects this idea and lists a number of expensive films which failed miserably at the box office. For Sadoul, low-budget production is the only way to oppose industrial concentration in the film trade. And the constitution of monopolies would mean the end of a free cinema. Sadoul concludes that the future of cinema relies more on low-budget (cheaper) films than on expensive ones. 'Technique is far from deciding on everything but it will be able tomorrow to give the directors the means to start their films without spending too much, without being hindered by a fossilised production and the monopolies.'¹³ As the last part of this study, which deals with the state of the industry in the 1990s, will show, Sadoul's conclusion constituted a particularly acute premonition of what the situation would be thirty years later. Meanwhile, the difference of opinion between some of the Communist critics and the Communist film personnel will be echoed and paralleled in terms of film reception before and after May '68.

5.1.2. The European Threat

Alongside the indictment of the New Wave, the European Community continued to be seen as a potential threat to the French film industry and the welfare of its workforce. In *Le Technicien du spectacle*, Pierre Chesnais expressed his concern at the consequences of the Common Market on national film industries. First he warns against the dangers of the concentration of the market in the hands of only large companies: 'besides, experience has told us that when a zone of free exchange is set up, it is always to the benefit of the strongest

¹³ Georges Sadoul, 'Les films à gros budgets tuent-ils le cinéma ?', *Les Lettres françaises*, n° 1065, 28 January-3 February 1965, p. 8.

industries and the most powerful conglomerates.’¹⁴ His second worry concerns the risk run by ‘international’ films of lacking character and eventually being totally uninteresting: ‘If Europe starts producing only big, “cosmopolitan monsters”, the quality of which might not be up to scratch, people will turn away from film. Thus it should be set as a principle, valid in every country, that the well-being of the [European] film industry is intimately linked with the safeguard of the national character of each production.’¹⁵ The free circulation of film technicians within the EEC was particularly feared and the reintroduction of the professional card was seen as a defence against this menace. For the *Fédération du spectacle* as well as for the Communist within the trade, the professional card constituted ‘the only guarantee of preserving high quality standards as well as the level of employment when the regulations concerning free movement of the film employees would be effective’.¹⁶ What seems to have been new though is the recognition that France would not be the only European country to suffer from the Common Market. Italian or German film industries as well would be victims of the new regulations. Meetings between representatives of different national film unions of the EC took place in December 1967 and March 1969. The December 1967 assembly, where Italy, England and France were represented, emphasised the fact that entertainment activities had to comply with the principles of international cultural cooperation put in place during the fourteenth session of the UNESCO on 4 November 1966. The first article recognises that:

- 1) All cultures have a dignity and a value which ought to be respected and preserved.
- 2) All peoples have the right and the duty to develop their cultures.
- 3) In view of their rich diversity and of their respective influence they have on each other, all cultures are part of the common heritage of human kind.

In view of the fact that the Treaty of Rome did not make any reference to culture, the participating organisations called first for the preservation and reinforcement of national aid in each country, and secondly for the preservation and promotion of conditions which would

¹⁴ Pierre Chesnais, ‘Rôle et influence des cultures nationales exprimées par le spectacle’, *Le Technicien du film*, n° 101, 15 January-15 february 1964, pp. 2-3.

¹⁵ Ibid.

¹⁶ Dujarric, ‘Vers le rétablissement de la carte professionnelle’, *Le Technicien du spectacle*, n° 106, 15 June-15 July 1964, p. 2.

ensure that each production would be the expression of its own national culture. The March 1969 assembly expressed the regret that too much emphasis had been put on financing and distribution, to the detriment of the cultural dimension of film. The organisations of the three countries insisted that the national character of a film was essential for its acceptance by the public: 'hybrid productions are not favoured by spectators'. They also warned against the increasing dependence of European production and distribution on American capital. They demanded that the system of coproduction not be used so as to aggravate the unemployment and working conditions of film employees, and that the clause on the free circulation of personnel not be applied to the film industry.¹⁷

Some of the fears expressed by the film trade unions seem to have been founded if one takes notice of some of the declarations made by European officials in relation to the European film industries. An important conference took place in Brussels only a few days before the 'events' erupted in Paris.¹⁸ The viability, the development and the future of a European film industry were discussed, revealing conflicting views on the consequences of greater European integration between the national film industries. Most participants favoured greater integration but their argument were mainly based on economic motives, insisting on the importance of making European film industries profitable.

The question is not, as has too often been said, to harmonise governmental aid to make it compatible with the treaty. Just as in the case of the agricultural policy, Community aid can only be justified if it does not subsidise activities which are permanently non-profitable. Structural remedies must be found to get rid of this structural and economical weakness. There is no reason whatsoever why a market as wide as the American one and as developed intellectually cannot put in place a profitable film industry.¹⁹

For Claude Degand, a senior civil servant in charge of cinema in Brussels, the fact that film is an art-form is too often the wrong excuse put forward to avoid an objective analysis of the situation. On the contrary, he says, it is because of the artistic facet of film that rational

¹⁷ 'Résolution des syndicats de techniciens anglais-italien-français à Londres les 24 et 25 mars dernier', *Le Technicien du film*, n° 159, 15 April-15 May 1969, pp. 2-3.

¹⁸ Symposium on European Cinema, held in Brussels on 24-25-26 April 1968, *Bulletin d'information du CNC*, n° 111-112, June-August 1968, pp. 134-54.

¹⁹ Raymond Rifflet, [Chef de cabinet de M. Jean Rey, President of the European Commission] 'Cinema and the general orientation of the European Community film Policy', *ibid*, pp. 137-40.

economic and industrial management should be emphasised. America's efficiency and power do not rest on money but on its aptitude for creation and innovation and enlightened decision-making, with money spinning off as a result of this.²⁰ Ironically, it was an American specialist who highlighted the risk of American hegemony over the European film market. Thomas H. Guback's long account of the various ways Hollywood and the United States set foot in different European countries and thus established a position of power and control over the respective national film industries over the previous twenty years stressed such a danger, and called for the public sector to intervene.

It seems to me that if European production and distribution should remain in European hands, the public sector must become responsible for it, in place of the private sector which, for whatever reason, has not been able to do so. I don't know whether a degree of autonomy will necessarily allow for better films in terms of artistic merit, nor for that matter whether internalisation and American penetration in the European market mean better movies. But I think that autonomy has potentially the means to increase the chances for safeguarding diversity and a difference of viewpoints. Since a film as a means of communication is an art which allows human reproduction of nature, it is imperative that various and conflicting perspectives be given the opportunity to exist and develop.²¹

Guback's statement did not diminish M. Paolo Bafile's admiration for the American film industry. This Italian film executive naively believed that Europe should take heed of the American example as it did not constitute a danger but should be copied by the European film industry.²²

²⁰ Claude Degand, 'Bilan et Perspectives', *ibid.*, pp. 142-144.

²¹ His analysis continues in a way which anticipates the discussion on GATT and MAI twenty five years later (see chapter 7): 'The move towards oligopolistic and monopolistic concentration in the American industry happens at the time of American expansionism. Although this may be a sign of efficiency at an economic level, it should be avoided at a cultural level. It would be a pity if there were only one printer in the world. It would be a great pity if one could only refer oneself to the literature and the papers of another country. The same applies to cinema and we shall have evidence of that before long. Time goes fast, but fortunately I believe it is not too late. Action must be taken, programmes must be adopted, an agreement can be reached. The Common market is the most appropriate framework for such action.' Thomas H. Guback, 'Les investissements américains dans l'industrie cinématographique européenne', *Bulletin d'information du CNC*, n° 111-112, June-August 1968, pp. 144-150. See also Thomas H. Guback, 'Quelques réflexions sur les industries cinématographiques européennes', *Cinéma 71*, n° 155, April 1971, pp. 80-87, and his book, *The International Film Industry* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1969).

²² 'Cinema and the general orientation of the European Community film Policy', *Bulletin d'information du CNC*, n° 111-112, June-August 1968, pp. 152-153.

Three years later, the Italian Minister for Tourism and Entertainment, Matteo Matteotti, issued a statement which called for a project that would ‘make easier and simpler the recognition of the European nationality of a film while retaining the specificity of their national character as the expression of a particular culture and a particular tradition’.²³ As it stands this statement should have reassured anyone that specific national cultures were not at risk. But Matteotti went on and put into words the worst possible scenario for the *Fédération du Spectacle* or the Communists: ‘It is only when a single legislation and a single administrative practice have been reached, with time, that it will be possible to attenuate the differences due to the different cultural reaction of each nation.’²⁴ The dreaded and resisted spectre of a unified and uniform Europe raised its ugly head. The belittling of national identities into mere ‘reactions’ or ‘reflexes’ could only fuel the instinctive anti-European feelings of many film employees in France as well as, undoubtedly, elsewhere in the EEC. Although there was the acknowledgment that other European film industries were also facing a troubling time, the *Fédération du spectacle* and the PCF remained France-centered in their analysis and distrust of Europe, believing that the French film industry ought to fight its battle on its own. As I shall examine in the final part of this study, the discourse on Europe and film would change, although many of the fears expressed in the 1960s and 1970s continue to be felt nowadays.

²³ This statement is very close to paragraph 1, article 128 of the Maastricht Treaty: ‘The Community shall contribute to the flowering of the cultures of the Member States, while respecting their national and regional diversity and at the same time bringing the common cultural heritage to the fore.’ See appendice 15, p. 392.

²⁴ Declaration of the Italian Minister for Tourism and Entertainment, Matteo Matteotti, on European cinema, in *Unicinéma*, August 1971, reproduced in the *Bulletin d’information du CNC*, n° 131-132, October-December 1971, p. 183.

5.1.3. A Divided French Film Industry? Yes...

In view of the rise of unemployment in the film trade, measures protecting the industry workforce were put forward with the approval of the *Fédération du Spectacle*, the defence of the professional card and the requirement of a minimum crew being the most welcome. The January 1965 issue of the *Cahiers du cinéma*, entirely devoted to the crisis of French cinema, contains the answers to a questionnaire sent to over forty directors. The conflicting positions of the two camps — tradition versus innovation — show how the New Wave had changed the face of the French film trade. The recent regulations establishing the minimum crew and increasing the range of categories of film personnel to require the professional card are particularly contentious.²⁵ Significantly, the majority of the directors who favour the newly established dispositions belong to the older generation, while most of the younger directors oppose the new regulation, although some find some value to the recent system. Among the directors who support the new decrees are Jacques Baratier, for whom a ‘professional control is necessary to avoid abuses’, Jacques Tati, Christian-Jaque who is ‘entirely in favour of the card and against underpaid amateurism’, Edmond T. Gréville, Georges Lautner, both for the same reason as the previous director. As a trade union man, Henri Colpi declares that he follows his union when it recommends a minimum crew ‘providing of course it does so without ostracism and excessive corporatist rationale’ for ‘the flag of freedom is often too quickly brandished: film is an art, indeed, but it is also a commerce and an industry’. Pierre Prévert thinks that it is a ‘small union victory’. Alain Resnais, who started his career in the late 1940s but was nevertheless associated with the younger generation, also supports the professional card because ‘it may prove very useful

²⁵ ‘The CNC has just brought out a new ‘*Décision Réglementaire*’ (n° 51, 10 July 1964) to replace, from 1 January 1965, the former *Décision Réglementaire* of 20 February 1952 [...] We have already explained how film technicians could benefit from the regulation of a domain, which, however complex, needs a codification to enhance its value, while protecting film technicians’, in ‘Réorganisation de la profession: les cartes professionnelles’, *Le Technicien du film*, n° 108, 15 September-15 October 1964, pp. 2-4. *Cahiers du Cinéma*, n° 161-162, January 1965, pp. 14-60 & 67. There were ten categories entitled to the professional card after decision n° 27, in 1952, and 17 after decision n° 51 in 1964, in Janine Ranou, ‘Un système de réglementation professionnelle en crise: la carte d’identité professionnelle de la cinématographie’, *Formation Emploi*, n° 39, July/September, 1992, pp. 19-34.

when the transformations brought about by the Common Market come into effect'. Robert Bresson's opinion was also quite balanced: 'The two equally important questions of unemployment and development of the film trade go hand in hand, but should be solved separately. Otherwise, measures taken to combat unemployment might hinder the development of the film production, which in turn might lead to more unemployment.' As could be expected, the two Communist directors, Daquin and Le Chanois, also endorse the new regulations. According to the latter, 'in the recent past there have been too many amateurs working for low wages', who were often too eager to 'justify their ignorance of the trade by contempt and the so-called uselessness of knowledge. Their mistakes may have been detrimental to French cinema'. In addition two TV directors, also Party members, approved the new decrees, Stelio Lorenzi did so 'resolutely', while Marcel Bluwal launched the most bitter attack against the New Wave I have come upon from the technicians' side. Here is the core of Bluwal's answer to the *Cahiers*'s questionnaire:

In films, since 1958, there has been a renaissance of sensibility through aestheticism. Meanwhile, there has been a *démission de la pensée*. Truffaut, Godard have killed French cinema, because, at the end of the day, the New Wave is nothing, it means nothing. It is a refusal to show the issues, it is a Cartier-Bressonism (the beautiful shown without any judgement on the event depicted), the New Wave is le *cinéma de papa* only prettier; it is a cinema of sensation not thought. [...] The *Cahiers* share responsibility in all this, in the refusal of the subject, the emphasis on *mise en scène*. [...] The only cinema left is a petit-bourgeois cinema for petit-bourgeois, a cinema for those who read *L'Express*, a cinema for intellectual snobs.²⁶

On the contrary, the voices which oppose the new decrees come overwhelmingly from the ranks of the new generation: Jacques Demy, Michel Deville, Jean-Luc Godard, Jacques Doniol-Valcroze, Marcel Hanoun, Pierre Kast, Claude Lelouch, Jean-Pierre Melville, Nico Papatakis, Marc Allégret, Philippe Arthuys, José Benazeraf. They find the minimum crew requirement unhelpful or absurd — for the director of *A bout de souffle*, 'a cabinet-maker does not need the same number of workers to make a chair as to build a house'. Chabrol considers that these decrees 'are part of the silly dictatorial character of the Fifth Republic's Gaullist regime', whereas for Doniol-Valcroze, 'it is going backwards, to the time of the

²⁶ *Cahiers du cinéma*, n° 161-162, January 1965, p. 22.

worst mistakes. The trade must be opened up, not closed in. Corporatist protectionism is the worst interpretation of trade unionism'. These declarations exemplify the conflict between tradition and innovation which arose during and after the New Wave and show that this was an ongoing conflict. Although they were undoubtedly motivated by rising unemployment among the employees of the film industry, it is difficult not to see the new measures as some kind of answer of the traditionalists in the industry to the maverick independent attitude of the new directors.

In all this, the PCF's film policy aligned itself with that of the *Fédération du Spectacle*. The Communist film employees systematically backed the claims of the CGT film union. Indeed the film policy advocated by the PCF was strongly influenced by the corporatist vision of the union. Throughout the 1960s the French Communist Party maintained an active presence in the film industry. The *Fédération du spectacle*, closely associated with the PCF, remained extremely powerful and, thanks to the development of the French television network, also enjoyed widespread membership in this booming audiovisual sector. Both the film cell and the Buttes-Chaumont cell (the Buttes-Chaumont TV Studios were the main ones at the time) were very active and mostly composed of film technicians.²⁷ In the booklet on the future of French cinema, *Où va le cinéma français?*, which the PCF published in 1964, the Party's recommendations for the improvement and the development of French cinema are presented. This document, marked by a corporatist point of view, does not differ from the type of statements the PCF made in the 1950s: its main argument remains focussed on the defence of a truly national cinema. First and foremost, the PCF calls for a reduction in the level of taxation imposed on films. The consequences of the Treaty of Rome should be limited in order to protect the indispensable national character of cinema. The *loi d'aide* should be improved so as to 'substitute to purely economic criteria of attribution, a policy of encouragement towards films whose quality, construction and style are really national'. In terms of production, the financing of films should be controlled by a specialised financial body, managed by the industry itself under State control. This body would insure the artistic

²⁷ One should not forget that for the *Fédération du spectacle*, the term technician covers most trades of the film industry, from the film worker to the director.

independence of the producers and prevent uncertain financial schemes. Existing studios should be protected and new ones built by the State and considered as national property. Instead of becoming an economic means of production, shooting on location would then correspond to an artistic project. Censorship should be abolished. Film schools should be democratised thanks to grants and evening classes and employment should be protected to stop technicians and film workers turning to other industrial sectors. The public should be educated and film societies sponsored by the State. The Cinémathèque should become a truly national film conservatory and extend its activities outside Paris to the provinces. In order for these proposals to become reality, a change of political regime was called for since at the time of writing, the regime was controlled by monopolistic capitalist interests. The brochure ends on this note: 'A national art, a popular art, French cinema must not die. To give it the means to tackle a number of contemporary issues with originality and audacity would ensure its audience and its future.'²⁸ A number of these demands represent the views of the *Fédération du Spectacle* as much as they did those of the PCF. In fact given the influence of the *Fédération du Spectacle*, there is no doubt that the documents issued by the Party or its film cell were determined to a large extent by the film union's position. Here one might say that, for once, it is as if it was the Party which acted as the 'transmission belt' of the CGT, and not the contrary.

The question of tax exemption constituted one such issue, but the mobilisation of the trade workforce around censorship and the Cinémathèque would prove even more powerful. Although the tax on film productions in France was less than those imposed in other European countries, to have cinema exempted from the tax became an insistent claim of the industry as a means of counteracting the worsening situation of French cinema.²⁹ This claim did not originate solely from the film employees' side. It was a measure supported by everyone in the film trade. On 30 March 1965, a day of industrial action took place

²⁸ Parti Communiste Français, *Où va le cinéma français ? Ce que propose le Parti Communiste Français* (Paris: PCF, 13 June 1965).

²⁹ In absolute value terms, France: 19.5%, Italy: 50.9, Germany: 6, Belgium: 4.6, Netherlands: 3.3; as percentage of gross receipts, France: 12.3%, Italy: 20.9, Germany: 3.6, Belgium: 19.5, Netherlands: 16, in Claude Degand and Jean-Claude Batz, *Situation de la cinématographie européenne, études, notes et documents* (Institut de Sociologie de l'Université libre de Bruxelles, 1968), p. A-43.

throughout France, with the support of all sectors of the industry: directors, actors, technicians, distributors, cinema owners and managers as well as producers.³⁰ André Malraux, the Minister for Culture, promised to answer the film trade's demand for tax exemption, but on 12 November 1965, a ministerial council refused to do so, and the calls for tax exemption remained high on the film unions' and the PCF's agenda. Even at the European level, this issue was raised. During the conference on Europe and film mentioned above, M. Eitel Monaco, speaking in the name of the 'industry', in other words, as representative of the European Film Industry Committee, considered that the main issue was taxation: 'only when tax exemption has taken place will it be possible to envisage the reduction of financial aid.'³¹ In its very ecumenism, the protest for tax exemption highlights an important aspect of the PCF's film policy prior to May '68. The Communists within the industry were consciously allying with the film employers in order to defend a particular industrial sector of the French economy: Not a very Marxist attitude indeed: where were the class struggle or the dictatorship of the proletariat? In the aftermath of May '68, this attitude would be addressed and criticised.

³⁰ 'Free cinema for all tomorrow for the national day for the defence of French cinema — against excessive taxation', *L'Humanité*, 29 March 1965; 'Seriously ill, French cinema begins today its fight for tax exemption — free screenings in 5000 theatres' — Fernand Grenier, deputy of the Seine, calls for a reduction of the rate of taxation from 12.04% to 2% — Samuel Lachize also considers that, after the reduction of taxation, an aid should be given to productions which are truly national in style and origin, *L'Humanité*, 30 March 1965; The front page of *L'Humanité* of 31 March 1965 shows a picture taken outside the Napoleon film theatre after a press conference with Roland Lesaffre, René Clair, Michel Auclair, Françoise Dorléac, François Périer, Jean-Pierre Cassel, Corinne Marchand, Bernard Lajarrigue, 'Operation Free Cinema Against Taxation: 100 million francs that Giscard won't get'. See also 'La crise du cinéma français', *Le Monde*, 28 March 1965.

³¹ The European Film Industry Committee regroups various associations dealing with production, distribution and technical industries from France, Italy, Germany, Belgium, Netherlands and Luxemburg. *Bulletin d'information du CNC*, n° 111-112, June-August 1968, p. 151

5.1.4. ...And No: Censorship and the Cinémathèque: Two Precursors of the May Events

In spite of its division, the French film world was still able to show an astonishing ability to rally and protest as one voice when the issue in question was deemed serious enough. The film trade found two good reasons to rally and organise a protest, the extent of which had not been witnessed since the demonstration against the Blum-Byrnes agreements. The Gaullist regime handed them to the French film world on a plate.

5.1.4.1. Censorship: The *Religieuse* Affair

Among the measures advocated by the PCF, the suppression of censorship is systematically mentioned. By censorship, the PCF means economic censorship but also its more obvious definition: political and moral. For the Party, the Gaullist regime was an authoritarian government. It is interesting to compare the Communist reactions to two episodes — the *Religieuse* affair and the Langlois affair —, which for many commentators, announced the events which took place in May 1968.³²

In both cases, the Gaullist government took measures that showed, on the one hand, its rather intolerant attitude in terms of censorship and, on the other hand, its rather abrupt, not to say, dictatorial, way of governing. Obviously, one would expect that these two related characteristics led to a vigorous campaign of denunciation from French Communist quarters. As we shall see now they did so, but the scope and the intensity of these campaigns were somehow different, thus revealing the contradictions and limits of the PCF's standpoint when the Party did not find itself at the vanguard of a conflict against the government or when its own positions did not meet with the success expected.

³² Both Jeancolas and Frodon associate the two affairs and hint at their pre-68 characteristics. Jean-Pierre Jeancolas, *Le Cinéma des Français: La Ve République 1958-1978* (Paris: Stock Cinéma, 1979), pp. 35-38, and Jean-Michel Frodon, *L'Âge moderne du cinéma français* (Paris: Flammarion, 1995), pp. 149-151.

On 31 March 1966, Jacques Rivette was confronted with the banning of his film adaptation of Jacques Diderot's *La Religieuse*, with Anna Karina in the title role, although the production of the play, which also starred Anna Karina, had been performed in 1962 without any public unrest.³³ A succession of articles published in *L'Humanité*, *France Nouvelle* and *Les Lettres françaises* indicates that French Communists followed the incident very closely and saw it as a means to attack both Malraux's cultural policy and de Gaulle's authoritarian style of government.³⁴ In *Les Lettres françaises*, Georges Sadoul was brought back thirty-five years, to the time when *L'Âge d'or* was banned by the prefect of police Chiappe. In both cases, as Sadoul duly underlines, it is a Parisian representative of the far right who was among the first to protest against the film, along with Catholic groups: M. Provost de Launay in Buñuel's case and, in Rivette's, M. Frédéric-Dupont, who asked that action should be taken against a film which 'damages the honour of French female religious orders'.³⁵ Yvon Bourges's replacement of M. Alain Peyrefitte as Minister of Information did not put an end to the affair. Although the censorship commission voted twice to authorise the film, only asking for 18 certificate — the second time by 12 votes for, 8 against and 2 abstentions —, the minister nevertheless decided to ban Rivette's latest film 'because of some of its situations and the way some characters behave, the film is likely to cause some distress for a large part of the population, especially given the particular scope and audience of a commercially distributed film. These considerations also apply abroad, in

³³ For a detailed account of the *Religieuse* affair, see Jean Pivasset, *Essai sur la signification politique du cinéma* (Paris: Cujas, 1969), pp. 213-229; see also Jean-Luc Douin, *Dictionnaire de la censure* (Paris: Presses Universitaires de France, 1998), pp. 370-372.

³⁴ See *L'Humanité*, 3 December 1965; Sadoul, 'Veut-on traiter *La Religieuse* comme jadis *L'âge d'or*?', *Les Lettres françaises*, 9-15 December 1965, p. 22; Hélène Cingris, 'Jacques Rivette et *La Religieuse* à La Chartreuse', *ibid.*, 23-29 December 1965, p. 20; *L'Humanité*, 30 March 1966, *ibid.*, 31 March 1966; *ibid.*, 2 April 1966; *ibid.*, 4 April 1966; *ibid.*, 5 April 1966; *ibid.*, 6 April 1966; Cervoni, 'L'affaire de *La Religieuse*', *France Nouvelle*, n° 1068, 6 April 1966, p. 23; Roland Desné, 'Pourquoi Diderot gêne-t-il encore?', *ibid.*, pp. 23-25; Pierre Daix, 'Libérons *La Religieuse*', *Les Lettres françaises*, 7-13 April 1966, pp. 1 & 19; Patrick Bureau, 'Entretien avec Jacques Rivette: Faut-il brûler Diderot', *ibid.*, p. 19; *L'Humanité*, 7 April 1966; 'La Religieuse à l'Assemblée nationale', *Les Lettres françaises*, 21-27 April 1966, pp. 1 & 14; Sadoul, 'La Culture et le revolver', *ibid.*, p. 13; *L'Humanité*, 25 April 1966; *ibid.*, 6 May 1966; *ibid.*, 7 May 1966; Sadoul, 'Cannes 66: très brillant début', *Les Lettres françaises*, 12-18 May 1966, pp. 18-22; *L'Humanité*, 21 December 1966; *ibid.*, 26 July 1967, Sadoul, 'La Religieuse enfin délivrée', *Les Lettres françaises*, 2-8 August 1967, p. 18.

³⁵ Georges Sadoul, 'Veut-on traiter *La Religieuse* comme jadis *L'Âge d'or*?', *Les Lettres françaises*, 9-15 December 1965, p. 22.

particular in some countries where this production might endanger the reputation and the authority of communities which, in many cases, work for a cause which plays a considerable part in the humanitarian and cultural renown of France.’³⁶

André Wurmser makes the Communists’ position very clear: ‘On the one hand, there is freedom of expression, i.e. tolerance, truth, open debate, on the other hand, censorship, arbitrariness, fanaticism and General de Gaulle.’³⁷ For the editorialist of *L’Humanité*, the *Religieuse* affair is a political operation masterminded by the most retrograde and anti-Communist among right-wing Catholics with a friendly ear within the government. Several Communist personalities were among the signatories of the symbolically named ‘1789 Manifesto’ set up in the wake of the ban by the film’s producer, Georges de Beauregard.³⁸ Meanwhile, the Film Technicians’ union, affiliated to the *Fédération du Spectacle*, decided to form a ‘Committee of Permanent Vigilance against Censorship’.³⁹ During a session at the National Assembly, the minister answered two oral questions addressed to him by two deputies from the Left: the Communist deputy M. Fernand Dupuy and the Socialist Georges Germain. M. Yvon Bourges’s answer is quite polemical, reminding the assembly that thirty-two films were banned when the Communists were in office and that the Socialists hold the record of complete bans with fifty-five films refused a certificate in three years. While he recognises the sincerity of the film, the quality of its performances, he nevertheless launches into a vibrant eulogy of the French nuns’ communities. What comes out at the end of his speech, is that the ban rests solely on the so-called distress that French nuns (*les bonnes sœurs*) might experience as a result of the film. The minister’s explanations fall a bit short, especially in view of the obvious contradiction of authorising the film to go to Cannes. The Communist deputy’s reaction is very strong. For him the decision is more than a mere blunder, it is a deliberate political gesture, which illustrates the relationship between the

³⁶ *L’Humanité*, 2 April 1966.

³⁷ André Wurmser, ‘La Religieuse et le général’, *L’Humanité*, 8 April 1966.

³⁸ *L’Humanité*, 2 April 1966. Among the signatories: Pierre Daix, Fernand Grenier, Samuel Lachize (who seems to have forgotten that, seven years earlier, he criticised *Les Quatre Cents Coups* for making fun of public school-teachers), Fernand Dupuy, Roland Desné, Robert Ballanger, leader of the Communist parliamentary group and member of the PCF’s Central Committee, *L’Humanité*, 6 April 1966.

³⁹ *L’Humanité*, 4 April 1966

Church and the State, and the increasing influence of the former over the latter. ‘Your decision, he concludes, puts at risk the freedom of artistic creation, the idea of culture itself and, more profoundly, democracy itself.’⁴⁰

As mentioned in *L’Humanité*, the decision taken by Yvon Bourges met with disbelief from every quarter of the political spectrum, bar the far right: only *Carrefour*, ‘ex-OAS supporter’, and the ‘fascist’ *Minute* approved the minister’s ban.⁴¹ The obvious absurdity of having banned the film and, at the same time, of allowing it to represent France in the Festival de Cannes of 1966, was picked up by the press. *L’Humanité* stresses that, while Rivette is part of the national selection, Resnais, who is not foreign to censorship, was not granted the same honour. His latest film, *La Guerre est finie* was deemed too controversial for the Spanish authorities. Lachize could not miss pointing to the sad irony of seeing the government, which included Malraux, the director of the anti-Franco *L’Espoir*, as a minister, choosing not to upset the Franco regime. Freedom of expression was once more sacrificed in the name of realpolitik. In the case of *La Religieuse*, the PCF was perfectly at ease in criticising the government’s accession to the demands of the Catholic lobby, scoring political points in the meanwhile.

5.1.4.2. The Cinémathèque Problem and the Langlois Issue

On 9 February 1968, the board of directors of the Paris *Cinémathèque* decided to dismiss Henri Langlois and replace him with Pierre Moinot as president and Pierre Barbin as administrative director.⁴² Henri Langlois, whose status in the film world was exceptionally high, had been one of the co-founders of this institution and had been its director since the Liberation.⁴³ The French film world was quick to respond to Langlois’s removal, and a massive protest movement began. Not since the Blum-Byrnes agreements had Paris seen so

⁴⁰ *Le Monde*, 2 May 1966.

⁴¹ *L’Humanité*, 13 April 1966. *L’Humanité* of 7 April 1966 published René Capitant’s reaction in the Gaullist weekly *Notre République*, where he criticised the ‘fault’ of the government in its decision.

⁴² *Le Figaro*, 10 February 1968.

⁴³ For a detailed historique of the Cinémathèque, see *Cahiers de la Cinémathèque*, n° 22, 1976-1977.

many film personalities taking to the streets. This was promptly relayed world-wide and an amazing number of famous film directors around the globe joined and advocated the boycott of their films at the *Cinémathèque*.

In a matter of hours, spearheading the protest, the newspaper *Combat*, and its film correspondent, Henri Chapier, launched an aggressive attack against André Malraux, and the government's decision : 'In the face of this measure (which has provoked consternation and dismay) having rekindled an appetite for conflagrations and barricades, the columns of this paper will be open to all filmmakers, writers, actors and collectors who are stunned and distressed by the removal of Langlois.'⁴⁴

On Monday 13 February, *L'Humanité* evokes the affair and the 'intense emotion' of the film world. Its account is quite balanced, giving some space to a presentation of the government's decision and its conclusion is certainly not as full-blooded as Chapier's:

There is no denying that Henri Langlois was not only the creator but also the passionate animator of a *cinémathèque* which the government has often ignored. Henri Langlois's sudden replacement has provoked a wave of protest and a feeling of anxiety among his friends and all those who know what the *Cinémathèque* owes to him. This surprising decision is much in keeping with this regime's style...⁴⁵

The next day, the Communist daily covered the case in detail, mentioning the wave of solidarity which has arisen from almost every quarter of the film trade. Its own analysis mentions the career of Langlois, and speaks of the 'legitimate emotion' of the film world. Yet its own terms are still much less angry than Chapier's, who turned the *Cinémathèque* affair into a personal crusade. Having said that, it is quite significant that the communiqué of the *Fédération Nationale du Spectacle*, which appeared as an headline, is much more strongly-worded than *L'Humanité*'s own comment:

The dismissal of Henri Langlois has provoked in the film world as a whole an intense indignation. This measure, besides the fact that it takes the form of a sanction against someone who is responsible for the first *cinémathèque* in the world, confirms the

⁴⁴ Henri Chapier, 'Scandale à la Cinémathèque — The revolting dismissal of Henri Langlois', *Combat*, 10 February 1968, in Glenn Myrent and Georges P. Langlois, *Henri Langlois*, trans. by Lisa Nesselson (New York: Twayne Publishers, 1995), pp. 239-240.

⁴⁵ *L'Humanité*, 12 February 1968.

willingness of the current regime to take effective control, in the cultural domain as in others, of all activities likely to serve its own interest.

The *Fédération Nationale du Spectacle* is keen to denounce this operation as part of Malthusian policy which runs contrary to the interests of culture as a whole and film culture in particular.⁴⁶

L'Humanité refers to the public demonstrations that took place, showing a photo of Claude Chabrol, Louis Marcorelles, Christiane Rochefort, Jacques Doniol-Valcroze, Jean-Luc Godard.⁴⁷ It gives the first lists of the signatories and announces that 'as they met on 11 February for the annual handing over of the new membership cards for the Film's Paris cell, 110 Communists adopted a motion by which they unanimously protest against the arbitrary decision to relegate Henri Langlois to the role of artistic advisor of the *Cinémathèque*'.

In the first issue of *L'Humanité Dimanche* which followed the beginning of the Langlois affair, François Maurin's text is much sharper than the first reactions published in *L'Humanité*. Above all his article is emblematic of the somehow confused and contradictory Communist position throughout the affair. First it reproduces the *Fédération Nationale du Spectacle*'s communiqué, thus letting once again the Communist point of view follow that of the main film union's.⁴⁸ The Communist critic remarks that 'the scale of the protest is clear evidence of Langlois's justified prestige', yet he admits that 'the management of the institution might have suffered some insufficiencies'. Maurin also mentions the national dimension of the case: 'France's own prestige is also at stake', an argument in keeping with the Communist position on national culture. It is his opening and closing remarks which encapsulate what is at the core of the Langlois case. On the one hand Maurin starts by stating that 'Langlois's dismissal represents a patent violation of the legitimate rights of a creator over his work'; and on the other hand, he concludes that the poverty of the institution because of a lack of public funding, does not match with the care which should be provided

⁴⁶ *L'Humanité*, 13 February 1968.

⁴⁷ Jean-Paul Belmondo, Jeanne Moreau, Catherine Deneuve, Jean-Louis Bory, Jean-Claude Brialy, Danièle Delorme, Samy Frey, Delphine Seyrig, Alain Delon, Christiane Rochefort, Michel Capdenac, Michel Cournot, Samuel Lachize, Henry Chapier, Jean-Louis Comolli, Robert Benayoun, Anne Philipe, Jean-Pierre Léaud, Micheline Presle, Michel Simon, etc., *L'Humanité*, 13 February 1968.

⁴⁸ François Maurin, 'Que signifie la "mise au pas" de la Cinémathèque française?', *L'Humanité Dimanche*, n° 155, 18 February 1968.

to a genuine public service of national interest.’⁴⁹ In the same paper Maurin defends the rights of Langlois as a private citizen who is responsible for his creation and refers to the Cinémathèque as a national public service.

Raymond Borde — one of the few voices who did not join the campaign and the director of the Toulouse Cinémathèque — blamed Henri Langlois for not managing the Cinémathèque properly and, more seriously, for having ‘irremediably damaged France’s and the world’s film patrimony’ by not protecting the films carefully enough. Borde therefore wonders why there was such a campaign in favour of such a man. ‘The Left came to defend the right of an individual over a patrimony which belongs to the nation. It exalted the collector against society and the private appropriation of cultural goods against their nationalisation. Never has the Left been in such opposition to its ideological past. For tactics’ sake, it sacrifices its morality, but it is in the name of morality that it condemns those who favour public intervention.’⁵⁰ In his reappraisal of the Langlois affair, Raymond Borde received the support of several journalists and historians. While Gaston Haustrate and Claude Beylie are in full agreement with him,⁵¹ Jacques Demeure, in *Positif*, disagrees with Borde as to the political significance of the affair.⁵² For Demeure, André Malraux was not in 1968, ‘the tired boxer’, Borde described him to be, but a right-wing minister working under a right-wing president. It is worth noticing that the trade journal *Le Technicien du film*, whose views were often close to the *Fédération du Spectacle*, took a different perspective on the matter. In an article entitled ‘*Il faut se dépêcher d’en rire avant que d’en pleurer*’, it portrays Langlois — ‘our national collector’ — in a rather ironic and negative way.⁵³ Besides, it recalls that, in 1956, Langlois had been offended by the call of Leopold Schlossberg — ‘one

⁴⁹ Ibid.

⁵⁰ Raymond Borde, *Les Cinémathèques* (Paris: Éditions L’Âge d’Homme, 1983), pp. 215-219. See also his own complete presentation of the Langlois affair in *Cahiers de la Cinémathèque*, n° 22, 1976-1977, pp. 23-37 & 53.

⁵¹ Gaston Haustrate, ‘Se libérer du complexe Langlois’, *Cinéma 77*, n° 221, May 1977, pp. 6-7; Claude Beylie, ‘Quand meurent les légendes’, *Écran 77*, n° 57, April 1977, p. 2.

⁵² Jacques Demeure, ‘Cinémathèque française: rompre le silence’, *Positif*, n° 194, June 1977, pp. 55-56 and n° 195-196, July 1977, p. 100.

⁵³ Henriette Dujarric, ‘Il faut se dépêcher d’en rire avant que d’en pleurer’, *Le Technicien du film*, n° 147, 15 March-5 April 1968, pp. 4-5.

of the pillars of the Technicians' union' — 'to build a *cinémathèque*'. Already in 1963, Henriette Dujarric hinted at managerial mishaps in the *Cinémathèque*.⁵⁴

There was undoubtedly a contradiction in the Communist position on the Cinémathèque affair. As I have shown in a previous chapter, the struggle between the rights of the creator over his work and the defence of the interests of the trade as a whole had been at the core of the Communist/*Fédération Nationale du Spectacle*'s film policy since the New Wave, with the interests of the trade's wage earners firmly established as a priority. In the case of the Langlois affair, the PCF and the *Fédération Nationale du Spectacle* took a back seat. As Jean-Luc Godard declared during the press conference at the Studio Action on 17 February: 'There is no point in brandishing the Communist scarecrow, the Communists have nothing to do with what is happening.'⁵⁵ Consequently, when Langlois was reinstated on 21 April, with the State withdrawing its subsidies to the Cinémathèque, the PCF could only express its regrets that such a national cultural treasure would no longer receive public financial support. This was hardly a triumph for a party which favoured nationalisations and greater state involvement in the film industry. Although there were few reservations expressed by the Communist press at the time the affair erupted, later comments, linking what happened in the case of Henri Langlois to the May events, suggest that the Communists realised that they were out of touch with their own beliefs, as they wondered a few months down the road, whether it was really a victory to see the State washing its hands of the whole business and cutting its links with the Cinémathèque.⁵⁶ Borde definitely has a point in relation to the nationalisation of the Cinémathèque, and to its status of public service. This should have been at the core of the Communist position. In this affair, it is as if the Communists preferred not to show a different viewpoint and joined the crowd, since it gave them a way to attack the cultural policy of the Gaullist government.

⁵⁴ 'While on 5 June M. André Malraux, Culture minister of State, inaugurated the second theatre of the Cinémathèque française... we learned from reliable sources that the management of the Cinémathèque française was under criticism. Many in the film trade openly evoke the disorderly situation of this institution, yet no serious protestation had been registered until now', Henriette Dujarric, 'Scandale à la Cinémathèque', *Le Technicien du film*, n° 95, 15 June-15 July 1963, p. 15.

⁵⁵ *Cahiers du cinéma*, n° 200-201, April 1968, p. 40.

⁵⁶ Albert Cervoni, 'Un mois qui ébranla le cinéma', *France Nouvelle*, n° 1179, 12 June 1968, pp. 20-21.

One of the consequences of the massive support enjoyed by Langlois during these several weeks was that it brought together directors and technicians from different ideological, professional, generational and aesthetical backgrounds. When had Daquin and Le Chanois last been seen together with Godard and Rivette? It was Le Chanois who put forward the idea of a defence committee for the Cinémathèque. Undoubtedly, the Langlois affair had united the French film world against the country's political regime. It would be all the easier for it to come together and join in the massive protest which would sweep the country a month later.

5.2. May '68

Although it is not within the scope of this work to study the May '68 events in depth, it seems nevertheless necessary to recapitulate briefly their key moments and recall the PCF's attitude. A student protest started on 22 March 1968 in the University of Nanterre. Several weeks later, a protest movement began La Sorbonne. Police were deployed on 3 May. This led to student demonstrations being promptly and brutally repressed by the use of force. After the night of the barricades (10 May), a massive demonstration was organised on 13 May, to which the Left and the trade unions (CGT and CFDT) lent their support. As the trade unions joined in the movement, the opposition to the Gaullist regime spread over the entire country. Numerous strikes began and by 24 May it is estimated that close to ten million French people had stopped work with the country becoming paralysed by a general strike. The student protest had triggered the most important political unrest which France had known since the Popular Front. On 24 May negotiations began between the unions and the government and on 27 May, an agreement was reached with substantial gains to the workers. De Gaulle announced the dissolution of the National Assembly on 30 May and that elections would take place at the end of June. These elections saw the French Right winning by a landslide.

The French Communist Party was at first very reluctant, not to say hostile, to the student movement, of which the Communist students did not approve. As early as the 'Movement of March 22' the Communists expressed the same kind of mistrust of and contempt towards the revolutionary organisations, be they Maoist or Trotskyist or otherwise, which they would display five weeks later.⁵⁷ Here is what a Communist student declared to *L'Humanité Dimanche* about the agitation in Nanterre:

⁵⁷ 'The "Movement of 22 March" typifies many of the concerns of the student movement: opposition to the war in Vietnam; dissatisfaction with the bureaucratic and authoritarian structures of university; a critique of the alienated and isolated character of student life; a suspicion of all organisation, all hierarchy, and of the traditional Left (in particular the PCF); and an at once powerful and confused equation of social and of sexual repression', Sylvia Harvey, *May '68 and Film Culture* (London: BFI, 1980), pp. 3-4.

The anarchists, the big mouth revolutionaries of all tendencies, make a lot of noise and declare that they are not interested in social demands. *I* am interested in them, and I know many who are too.

That the UNEF (Union Nationale des Étudiants de France) has not been able to take care of these demands by failing to organise the movement in collaboration with other democratic organisations goes some way to explain what's happening in Nanterre.

But it is precisely the anarchist and gauchiste groups which have disarmed the UNEF, which now would like to lead astray the student movement by other means. It is clear that the students and the democratic forces won't let them accomplish a task which the government is too happy to benefit from in order to impose its measures and exert its authoritarian control over the students.⁵⁸

It is quite remarkable that in a simple interview with a Communist student a month before May, one can find encapsulated the two main lines of the Communist discourse in relation to the May '68 events. Firstly, the mistrust towards the 'gauchistes' is blatant: they must be checked lest they corrupt the students. Moreover, actions led by the 'gauchistes' make them objective allies of the Right.⁵⁹ Secondly, the interview makes clear the emphasis on students' demands over idealist revolutionary prospects. The same attitude would prevail over the weeks to come, hence the PCF's claim that the satisfaction of workers' demands, thanks to the Grenelle agreements, constituted a victory. At stake here is the key question of May '68: Was May '68 a revolutionary moment in French history, which the Left should seize, or was it not? For the PCF, the answer is that it was not. Following the Grenelle agreements and in view of the prospect of a General Election, the PCF chose the 'parliamentary road' against 'gauchiste' adventurism, while the CGT enjoined the workers to go back to work: 'Wherever the essential claims have been satisfied it is in the workers' interest to pronounce themselves overwhelmingly in favour of a return to work.'⁶⁰ The 'sensible' attitude of both the CGT and the PCF and their repeated rejection of far left groups were to leave their mark on the relationship between the French extreme left and the Communist Party for many years to

⁵⁸ 'Je suis étudiant à Nanterre, un entretien de Pierre Level avec Charles Silvestre', *L'Humanité Dimanche*, n° 162, 7 April 1968.

⁵⁹ 'The Communists have always maintained — and up to now this has been true — that revolutionary movements claiming to be to the left of the PCF helped to divide the working class and always wound up 'objectively' to the right of the Party. To discuss this view today is, I think, to state the problem wrongly. We have to ask ourselves, not whether we are to the right or to the left of the PCF, but whether we are truly on the Left', Jean-Paul Sartre, *Situations VIII* (Paris: Gallimard, 1972), p. 185, in Keith Reader, *The May 1968 Events in France* (New York: St Martin's Press, 1993), p. 64.

⁶⁰ Declaration of the Federal Committee of the CGT on 5 June, in Harvey, p. 10. For a more thorough depiction of the May events, see Reader, pp. 1-19, and Harvey, pp. 3-14.

come. As will be shown in the last part of this work, a rapprochement has occurred in the recent past after a long and bitter period of non-communication.

May '68 affected the French film world as it did all other sectors of French society. Industrial dispute hit the film industry. The IDHEC and the Rue de Vaugirard film schools went on strike and students occupied both schools (15 May). Famously, the Parisian upsurge's shock wave could be felt as far away as Cannes, where a number of directors refused to show their films and the Film Festival had to be closed down (18 May).⁶¹ On 19 May an AGM of the film technicians' union voted for indefinite strike, followed by the ORTF's directors' and technicians's decision to do likewise.

5.2.1. The Estates General of French Cinema (États Généraux du Cinéma Français, EGC)

Firmly establishing its revolutionary credo by borrowing its name from the Estates General which met in Versailles in May 1789 and led to the French Revolution, the Estates General of French Cinema constituted nevertheless the central piece in the overall context of May '68.⁶² Sylvia Harvey has described very precisely how they came about:

A couple of days after the great united student-worker demonstration of May 13 a special Cinema Commission was set up among the Action Committees at the Sorbonne, and a number of films screenings were organised in secondary schools within and outside Paris, in various university buildings and in a number of factories. [...] On Friday 17 the CGT Union of Film Production Technicians called together a number of technicians, directors, and members of the French actors' union as well as students from the two main film and photography schools: the *Institut des Hautes Études Cinématographiques* (L'IDHEC) and the *École Nationale de Photographie et de Cinématographie* (ENPC). Out of this meeting and a subsequent meeting between members of the film technicians' union and the editors of the *Cahiers du cinéma* came the suggestion for a new institution to be called the Estates General of French Cinema.

An action committee and the film technicians' union itself issued invitations to all those active in or interested in French film culture to attend the first meeting of the EGC that evening (17 May), at the ENPC building in the rue de Vaugirard, which had been occupied by the film and photography students for a couple of days. More than a thousand people met for the inaugural session. In the weeks that followed the EGC

⁶¹ See Frodon, pp. 230-232.

⁶² 'It was this Third Estate of the States General which in 1789 both expressed and organised the massive transformation of class realtions within French society, replacing the old order by the new, the clergy and nobility by the commons, but a commons firmly led and directed by the bourgeoisie', Harvey, p. 17.

continued to meet in the premises of the occupied school and then moved out to the Cultural Centre at Suresnes on the outskirts of Paris where three General Assemblies were held on May 26 and 28 and on June 5.⁶³

The EGC was an open forum of discussion on all aspects of the French film industry. The debates centred on the need for an overall reorganisation of the film industry and the ways this could be achieved. Towards the end of May, several proposals were submitted to the EGC's general assembly. As happened elsewhere, the revolution versus reformism issue pervaded the EGC's discussions. Harvey rightly underlines that 'like the Committee for the Defence of the Cinémathèque the EGC was a broad front organisation, encompassing a fairly wide variety of political positions'.⁶⁴ Consequently, this should be borne in mind when considering the different proposals for a reorganisation of the French film trade.

Among all the proposals, the majority of votes went for three plans, numbers 13, 16, and 19. Proposal 16 declared its intention to make 'a radical break' with the existing system, and spoke of the need to bring about 'the destruction of the old structures' of the French cinema. It proposed the setting up of a public sector which would be in competition with the private sector of the industry, the abolition of all censorship bodies, the establishment of a central office which would organise the direct collection of all box office monies and their subsequent redistribution, and the abolition of the existing division between cinema and television industries.⁶⁵ Proposal 13 was put together by officers and members of the CGT Film Technicians' Union and was proposed by Pierre Lhomme. 'It was approved by the majority of the members of the union. This project, like proposal 16, emphasised the need to set up a public sector for film production, distribution and exhibition under the principles of workers' control. In addition it underlined the particular importance of education in film for both producers and spectators.'⁶⁶ Project 19 was close to projects 16 and 13 but insisted on 'the need to find new projection sites, so that films could be projected in factories, and firms,

⁶³ Ibid., p. 17.

⁶⁴ Ibid., p. 21.

⁶⁵ Project 16 was the plan adopted by a group of directors consisting of René Allio, Jean-Louis Comolli, Paula Delsol, R. Dembo, Jacques Doniol-Valcroze, Jean-Paul Le Chanois, Louis Malle, Jean-Pierre Mocky, Jean-Daniel Pollet, Alain Resnais, Jacques Rivette, Jacques Wagner, in Harvey, pp. 21-22.

⁶⁶ Ibid., p. 23.

schools and universities, youth clubs and cultural centres, ships, trains, aeroplanes and other means of transport, and mobile projection units created in suburban and country areas.’⁶⁷ Project 4, drawn by Thierry Derocles, Michel Demoule, Claude Chabrol and Marin Karmitz, went much further. Considered as the most revolutionary of the plans put to the vote, it called for a free cinema entirely financed by a national fee which would make each citizen a financial contributor to the film industry and each spectator a producer.⁶⁸

On 5 June, a synthesis project drawing from plans 13, 16, and 19 was put together as a ‘minimal programme around which the EGC might unite’, but the most radical of the participants rejected it, and as Sylvia Harvey explains, the EGC could only pass ‘a rather brief and general final motion which, while making quite explicit the political nature of the EGC’s opposition to the existing system, failed to produce a programme of concrete proposals to be agreed and acted upon by all.’⁶⁹

The Communist position on the proposals put forward to the EGC conformed to its general attitude elsewhere. Although there were few echoes in the Communist press of the debates as they were taking place, the subsequent debriefing of what happened in Suresnes conveyed the Party’s rejection of adventurism and its support for a step-by-step approach to change.⁷⁰ Both Cervoni in *France Nouvelle* and Maurin in *L’Humanité Dimanche* related and analysed the results of the EGC in similar terms. In a long survey of what happened during the Estates General of French Cinema, Maurin explains the Communist point of view. It will come as no surprise that his main criticism is aimed at the lack of pragmatism and the adventurism, which, he says, spoilt what should have been a step forward in the development of the French film industry. Echoing in every way the Party’s overall attitude to the May events, Maurin opposes the concrete gains obtained by the film employees as a result of their industrial action to the more abstract debates of the EGC. Nevertheless he considers that the overall result of the discussions is positive since ‘for the first time an open and united

⁶⁷ Ibid., p. 25.

⁶⁸ Ibid., p. 26.

⁶⁹ Ibid., p. 27.

⁷⁰ This is in essence, what the CGT union delegate and the Communist activist tell the angry and frustrated worker in *La Reprise du travail aux usines Wonder* as shown in *Reprise*. Dir. Hervé Le Roux, Les Films d’Ici, 1997.

forum of discussion has tackled important issues which may lead to possible successes if immediate action is taken'.⁷¹ A week later, the tone was much more critical, and the blame was laid at the *gauchiste* and romantic revolutionaries who prevented the EGC from acting effectively and realistically. In fact, Maurin, who subtitled this part of his article 'Disability from birth', made clear that the Communists never wholeheartedly believed in the success of the EGC because of its *gauchiste* origins. The May events allowed the journalist to revise the Communist position on the Langlois affair. Maurin acknowledges the feeling of frustration common to many French film directors, especially after the disappointment at Malraux's lack of achievement and his censorship policy. He then revisits the Langlois affair. Understanding the anger felt by many in the face of the authoritarianism displayed by the Gaullist regime, Maurin hints at the excessive personalisation of the campaign which put Langlois back at the head of the Cinémathèque: the affair 'brought to light the first symptoms of a subjectivism of which we have just witnessed the result. Thus with a few months' hindsight, the Committee of Defence of the Cinémathèque appears to have been the first catalyst of many energies engaged in the EGC.'⁷²

⁷¹ 'While the strike continues in film studios to obtain the respect of union rights — the control of film crews, the reduction of working time without wage loss — work resumed Wednesday morning in the laboratories after gaining substantial improvements. Among which, wage increases from 9.48 to 12.2% for the less privileged categories, salaries paid on a monthly basis for film employees who have over eight years' service, recognition of union rights, payment of the strike days to the ratio of 50%, and several other gains. Meanwhile theatre and film people are holding their Estates General, as are the artists. They discuss the best ways and the best forms to make their work accessible to the widest audience. It is there that ideas seem the most confused insofar as the questions raised by the structural reorganisation necessary to reach the goal, lead quite naturally to take into consideration economics, political and social matters relative to the current situation as it is but which many do not seem to want to take into account. None of the proposals included in the final document can be applied in the near future. There are mostly ideal structures which may only become reality under a regime of advanced democracy, since they imply a nationalisation of production, distribution and exploitation as well as a powerful State-controlled sector. Yet, the overall result is positive', François Maurin, 'Quand le spectacle se penche sur son futur', *L'Humanité Dimanche*, n° 171, 9 June 1968.

⁷² 'Born on May 15, out of a "film commission" set up by four young film technicians in La Sorbonne and a first assembly of the students in the Vaugirard film school, from their first days, the Estates General have been subjected to the same influences which have corrupted the legitimacy of the students' claims and led to adventurism. Utopianism, the fanciful character of most of the decisions taken during the first days of endless discussions saturated with revolutionary jargon, were the ingredients ensuring future failure, such as the abolition of the CNC on 21 May, taking great pride in refusing to consider any proposal of immediate reform, which could be applicable even within the framework of the existing system. The Cannes Film Festival was interrupted on the pretext that it was a petit bourgeois festival and everyone worked flat out on a restructuring plan for the whole of the French film trade, which was unworkable unless a regime of advanced democracy, freed from the monopolies' stronghold was enforced. The Estates General of the Cinema have undoubtedly been victim of their own impatience. This impatience could be evidenced by the decisions taken and the anarchic character of the prevailing methods employed, be they that of "direct democracy" or "permanent protest", and which led to nothing. It is not enough to announce that cinema is free or that the best films can

Maurin contrasts ‘what is possible today’ with ‘what is possible tomorrow’: the film trade unions’ proposals might not be ‘revolutionary’, they have the advantage to be realistic and they can be applied in the short term.⁷³ That the Communists regret that the synthesis project was not adopted does not come as a surprise. Harvey rightly points out that it was characterised ‘by both the search for new practices, and adherence to older formulae’.⁷⁴ Promoting a dual system by which a public film sector could cohabit with a private sector, ‘the system was still motivated by the need to produce profit on capital invested. In terms of the relationship between film production and the state, the proposals assumed no revolutionary transformation of that state.’⁷⁵ The reformist character of the synthesis project was on a par with the PCF’s stance in May ’68, which did not consider that the situation could lead to a revolutionary transformation of the country but opted for a gradual move towards advanced democracy through legal and parliamentary means and called for a Communist vote in the next general elections.⁷⁶ This ‘sensible’, Republican attitude triggered bitter criticism on the part of the extreme left, which saw the PCF’s stance as a betrayal of the revolutionary spirit of the May events. Maurin’s analysis of the failure of the EGC was mostly political, contrasting the dangerous utopian slant of the far left with the down-to-earth

be projected free to make them accessible to the larger public. In the actual state of things and given the absence of a true framework providing cultural stimulation for the masses, the risk is to confirm the same choices and to maintain quality or experimental films in their ghetto. Likewise it is not sufficient to declare the abolition of the CNC to suppress its role, as it is still in existence’, Maurin, ‘Les États généraux du cinéma français, l’utopie et le réel’, *L’Humanité Dimanche*, n° 172, 16 June 1968.

⁷³ ‘A platform considered by the majority of the profession as an ideal springboard for the development of their work had been reached, but that suddenly everything collapsed and the discussion went on all day and all night, contesting paragraph after paragraph. The Estates General were then forced to acknowledge their failure. In the following days, after so many efforts and hopeful moments, discouragement set in. A feeling of uselessness, hopelessness and disappointment fell on a less and less assiduous assembly, as work resumed in the laboratories and film crews started shooting film again. Amid the confusion, only the film unions had taken the trouble of putting together a set of precise demands. Admittedly these were not intended to revolutionise everything, but the concrete character of the benefits obtained allowed us at least to leave with the feeling that we had not wasted our time. The reproach which could be made at the Estates General is not that they dreamt of a cinema freed from the constraints of capitalism but, on the contrary, that they did not allow for a period of transition, for the reason that it smacked of “reformism” and, by not doing so, failed to work constructively’, *ibid.*

⁷⁴ Harvey, p. 25.

⁷⁵ *Ibid.*

⁷⁶ ‘We made the mistake of letting ourselves be imprisoned by words, in spite of the fact that, today no more than yesterday, the choice is not between reformism and revolution, but between oppression and democracy. It is only within a true democracy, seen as a progressive process, that cinema will be able to find, step by step, all the freedom and possibilities of creation it needs, in institutional as well as economic terms, in order to become, in effect, one of the essential elements of culture, as film should be. We still have a chance to show that we can be efficient. Film workers, like all the other manual and intellectual workers will have this opportunity on June 23’, Maurin, *ibid.*

pragmatism of the Party. While he also condemns adventurism and the romantic revolutionaries' utopian perspective, Cervoni offers an analysis of what took place at Suresnes, which takes into account the specific context of the film industry. Cervoni also acknowledges the importance of what happened to the industry: 'something big happened and its effects have reached every sector of the film trade', and like Maurin, regrets that the synthesis project did not meet the EGC's approval.⁷⁷ Yet Cervoni brings into the discussion the everlasting problem of the contradictory interests of the different categories of film personnel. For the Communist critic, one of the most utopian aspects of the EGC was the belief that these conflicting views could be abolished or hidden under the magic carpet of May '68: 'In a situation of scarce resources, with intense competition for jobs, and financing available for relatively few projects, the differences of interest between producers and directors, directors and technicians, and technicians and students, or (even more intensely) between technicians and amateurs, were bound, sooner or later, to break apart the precarious unity of the organisation.'⁷⁸ Cervoni's examination of the Estates General of Cinema shows that May '68 did not put an end to the divisions within the profession. The dichotomy between the technical categories of personnel and the auteurs, between the film workforce and the directors or those more closely involved with the creative side of the film trade persisted. Indeed the conflict exacerbated once May '68 fireworks went silent.

⁷⁷ 'To take the Estates General of French Cinema as an example, it is fundamental and essential that, even if the Estates did not reach their full conclusion, the two projects which were backed by the greater number of participants were two serious and thoroughly accomplished texts, in spite of the confused, disorderly and quaint character of the procedure. A synthesis between the union-inspired proposal submitted by Pierre Lhomme and the proposal submitted by Louis Malle was attempted. There were indeed many points on which the two projects were at one in terms of the seriousness of both the analyses and the proposals', Cervoni, 'Un mois qui ébranla le cinéma', *France Nouvelle*, n° 1179, 12 June 1968, pp. 20-21. Cervoni also looks back at the Langlois affair: 'Whatever Henri Langlois's merits, the fact that he was reinstated as director of the Cinémathèque, the financial responsibility for which no longer rests with the Gaullist State (unsurprisingly), cannot possibly be called a victory.'

⁷⁸ 'But one cannot conceal one's sentimentalism or demagogy if one ignores, deliberately or not, the divisions of the different groups which were there. Producers, directors-producers, wage-earning directors, technicians, film workers, might have some common interests (especially in an industry in crisis like the film industry), they also have their differences of interests, which more often than not are contradictory [...] In the absence of a revolutionary transformation of French society, it is difficult to see how this extraordinarily diverse collection of directors and producers, technicians and students, could have developed a working unity over a long period of time. In other words, without a revolution in society it is difficult to see how the EGC could have expected a working future for itself, given that the differences of interests between the members of the organisation could only be exacerbated within a capitalist mode of production', *ibid.*, p. 21.

5.2.2. Auteur Cinema Versus Mainstream Cinema

The utopian unity of the French cinema family was short-lived. It did not take long before the acknowledgement of failure of the Estates General led to a return to earlier entrenched positions. The *Fédération du Spectacle* reverted to its corporatist attitude while the film directors created with the *Société des Réalistes Français* (SRF), a body devoted to the defence of their own particular interests. In other words, the gap between mainstream cinema and auteur cinema became apparent once again.

During a press conference at the 1969 Cannes Film Festival, the *Fédération Nationale du Spectacle* drew attention to the problems faced by the film employees, in particular the high level of unemployment due to a fall in the number of film produced and the films' budget rates. The film union's demand rang amazingly familiar: a call for State intervention, tax exemption, higher subsidies, the end of censorship and the reorganisation of the CNC.⁷⁹ It is as if May '68 and the Estates General of French Cinema had never happened. In fact, the situation actually deteriorated. Instead of more State intervention in the industry, the film union as well as the *Société des Réalistes de Films* witnessed the privatisation of the public company, the *Union Générale Cinématographique* (UGC) although they had asked that it remained in the public sector as a vehicle for the distribution of quality French films with a cultural value.⁸⁰

This was one rare occurrence when the *Fédération du Spectacle* and the independent *Société des Réalistes de films* (SRF) shared a common point of view. The SRF, which is very much alive today, is an association which was founded on 14 June 1968, regrouping directors and director-producers, whose aim was to defend artistic, moral, professional and economic freedom of creation and participate in the development of a new structure for French cinema. Its founding members were Jean-Daniel Pollet, Claude Lelouch, Pierre Kast,

⁷⁹ 'Cannes 69, une rencontre professionnelle unique au monde', *Le Technicien du film*, n° 161, 15 June-15 July 1969, pp. 2-4.

⁸⁰ Henriette Dujarric, 'Il faut conserver l'UGC secteur d'État', *Le Technicien du film*, n° 175, 15 October-15 November 1970, p. 3 and Dujarric, 'L'affaire UGC', *Le Technicien du film*, n° 176, 15 November-15 December 1970, p. 3.

Jacques Rozier, René Allio, Philippe de Broca, Robert Bresson, Serge Roulet, Jacques Doniol-Valcroze, Michel Cournot, Jacques Rivette, Jacques Poitrenaud, Jacques Deray, Louis Malle, Jean-Gabriel Albicocco, Robert Enrico, Luc Moullet, Delsol Paula, Alex Joffe, Marcel Carné, Claude Berri, Jean Becker, Jacqueline Audry, Edouard Molinaro, Francois Rigaud, Jean-Louis Comolli, Charles Bitsch, Jean-Paul Rappeneau.⁸¹ As this list of names testify, the SRF attracted mostly auteurs while its setting up may be considered as one of the few concrete outcomes of the Estates General of French Cinema. The gap between the film industry employees and the auteurs, which came to light after the New Wave widened again after the short-lived May '68 community of spirit. In an interview with the *Technicien du film* in 1970, Henri Back, a well-known film trade-unionist, criticised the government for 'having never followed a coherent film policy to develop the national cinema', and Malraux for 'only helping auteur cinema to the detriment of entertainment cinema which is favoured by the public at large.' For Back, 'It would seem natural for mainstream films to receive the same encouragement as the auteur films', and 'the legal dispositions which protect the French film industry should be respected. For instance, films shot on location as well as abroad should not be entitled to the same advantages'. When asked about the demands put forward by the SRF, Henri Back repeats the same argument: 'One cannot endorse the demands of the SRF. They are targeting the development of an auteur cinema to the detriment of entertainment cinema, whereas both expressions should complement one another in the interest of cinema as a whole. Among other things, the SRF implicitly condemns the use of film studios since most young directors know nothing of the technique of studio work. Besides, given the actual economic situation, the methods of remuneration they advocate often go against the quality of the films they are making, while not bothering about the working regulations. Their demands would be better understood if they were targeting the government to obtain the means to make their films in proper conditions for their crew.'⁸² There was not much difference between these declarations and those made five years before,

⁸¹ Société des Réalisateurs de Films, *La Règle du jeu*, Paris: Albatros, 1978, p. 1.

⁸² 'Henri Back répond à nos questions', *Le Technicien du film*, n° 170, 15 April-15 May 1970, p. 5. A union man since 1936, Secretary general of the Film Workers' Union in 1947, Henry Back was an important figure of the *Fédération du Spectacle*.

when the New Wave was accused of jeopardising the future of French cinema.⁸³ There did not seem to be any understanding or common ground to be found between the auteurs and the *Fédération du Spectacle*. Bertrand Tavernier offered a very concrete illustration of this antagonism. In an interview with *Rouge* on *Les Enfants gâtés* which he directed and produced, Tavernier declared: 'I co-produced the film. To deal with the financial aspect oneself is not a solution I would recommend. But, when one can do it, it allows one to play around the margins of freedom of the system, to balance what we want to say and the cost of the film. Many directors have become their own producers, Allio, Féret, Bernard Paul. It is a source of difficulty with the CGT Film Technicians Union. I was expelled from the Union board because of that. Since I was a producer, I was a boss, full stop. But I did not understand the difference between a director who is not a producer, but who receives a percentage on the benefits (as it was my case when I made *Le Juge et l'assassin*), when I sat at the Union board) and the very same director who turned producer? It is actually a point of contention between the Film directors' cell and the direction of the Film Technician Union, which is also Communist. This question should be the object of a serious debate.'⁸⁴ Mainstream cinema versus 'art' cinema remained a divisive issue within the film trade. It would also prove a source of tension within the Communist section of the film trade.

5.2.3. Is There an Auteur in the PCF?

The existence of different points of view on the question of auteur cinema in the Party would become more obvious after May '68. As far as the industry is concerned, the core of the Communist position on film policy not only remain unchanged, it actually became more 'proletarian'. An internal and undated text published by the film cell entitled *The Communists and the Difficulties of French Cinema* exposed positions which once again stuck closely to the *Fédération du Spectacle*'s. Although the title of the document refers to 'the Communists', there are many more references in the text to 'the trade union'. It is clear

⁸³ See present chapter, pp. 175-177.

⁸⁴ *Rouge*, 7 September 1977.

that for its writer(s), the words ‘trade union’ and ‘Party’ are absolutely interchangeable. This document can safely be dated as post May ’68 as its introduction mentions the unpopularity of the PCF in the aftermath of the events.⁸⁵ There are several revisions of the Communist policy in the text. First the document acknowledges that mistakes had been made in the past. The Communists had vacillated between two positions. Sometimes it had advocated an ‘unholy alliance with the employers’ to the detriment of the film employees, sometimes it had taken the opposite view: “We don’t care about the employers’ problems, they can pay”, as if the film sector could be assimilated to any other industrial sectors.’ What the Communists had to do now and once and for all was to look at the problems facing the film industry strictly ‘with the point of view of the salaried employee in mind’. The whole document then revolves around the following question: ‘How on the one hand can we assure audio-visual technicians that the terms of the national collective labour agreement will be respected? On the other hand how can we assure them that they will be able to keep fighting for the constant improvement of their working conditions?’ The proposals contained in the document refer to the unification of the audiovisual sector, the defence and regulation of the professional card, in spite of the objections raised during the May events, the regulation of the conditions of access to the different professional categories of the film industry, and the harmonisation of salaries to all audiovisual sectors, i.e. film and television.⁸⁶ The corporatist rationale behind these proposals is obvious. In fact, what seems to be the core of the matter is the protection of the film workforce in view of the multiplication of marginal films, as well as auteur films, in the aftermath of May ’68 and the setting up of the SRF. The position to adopt in relation to auteur, marginal or independent cinema remained a key question for the Communists working in the film industry.

The 93-page long document contains a long section on the question of marginal cinema. A sub-chapter, entitled ‘Marginal films and “cultural” films’, acknowledges that these

⁸⁵ ‘The May events reminded us that the Communists were rarely chosen on account of their good looks and that friendship, personal esteem and sympathy did not mean much when they had to be pushed to the side because of their membership to the PCF, when the Party’s policy was badly understood’, in *Les Communistes et les problèmes du cinéma français*, Paris, BIFI, Fonds Jean-Paul Le Chanois, Box 35/165.

⁸⁶ Ibid., pp. 38-40.

categories correspond to an 'objective evolution of the film trade', since they now 'occupy a noticeable part in film production'. While the writer(s) wonder(s) about the attitude Communists should adopt regarding marginal films, they regard these as 'harmful because they are "abnormal" in terms of their conditions of existence, the way they are made, and the confusion they introduce into the production system. Yet they are also basically positive in terms of their qualities as "independent", "free", "cultural" films'.⁸⁷ The ideal solution, according to the document would be for this sector to disappear altogether and for the films to be made under the normal conditions of production so as to be integrated into the system, which proves impossible since 'it is because the system is what it is, that these films are made under different conditions.' This strong corporatist viewpoint was not shared by all in the PCF.

There were Party members within the film trade who were deeply unhappy with this kind of discourse. In a conversation with Pascal Aubier, Bernard Eisenschitz explains that 'the people with whom they got on well when discussing cinema (Barbet, Cottrell, Nestor, Eustache) pretended to be, or were, right-wing whereas those they met in the Communist film cell may have been left-wing but were also extremely reactionary in trade terms'. 'It is incredible to see how much they bore us a grudge, this was where one felt the class struggle was taking place', Pascal Aubier adds. 'One had to work according to the norms, especially the trade union norms.' Eisenschitz thought that 'the Communist film cell was some kind of Communist rear-guard, but realised that they were emblematic of the trade as whole. Eisenschitz and Aubier mention nevertheless that some of these traditionalists were able to change, such as Louis Daquin.⁸⁸ Communist critics and journalists also came on the auteurs' side while underscoring that the roots of the problem lay in the economic organisation of the industry which frustrates aspiring filmmakers. Thus, in *La Nouvelle Critique*, Jean-André Fieschi and Bernard Stora extended Cervoni's point about diverging interests of the EGC: 'Not everyone was speaking of the same thing, followed the same

⁸⁷ Ibid., pp. 31-32

⁸⁸ Pascal Aubier, *Les Mémoires de Gascogne* (Paris: Sybarite/Yellow Now, 1996), pp. 38-41. Louis Daquin would eventually become co-president of the SRF in 1978.

goals, or the same interests.’⁸⁹ According to the Communist writers, ‘the whole of the film industry’s workforce was not present at the Estates General’, but the assembly was essentially ‘composed of directors or technicians closely associated with film-making or people directly interested by the creative facet of the trade’. In other words, their interests were probably contradicting those of other categories within the trade. This is what Fieschi and Stora stated in an unusually clear fashion in a French Communist context: ‘In a way, it would be better to state frankly that cinema as an art-form appears to be in contradiction with cinema as a trade.’ Although this seems like stating the obvious, such a statement calls into question the anti-auteurist views expressed by the *Fédération du Spectacle* or the Communist film cell. Fieschi and Stora try to look objectively at the consequences of the dichotomy of art versus trade:

It would appear that the situation is inextricable. On the one hand, the directors (and in some respect, the public) consider that their projects cannot be completed because of the excessive demands of the wage-workers (size of film crew, wages, working conditions). On the other hand, the workers tend to look at any venture which does not conform to the traditional canons with great suspicion. Consequently, since it is the auteur films or the ‘difficult’ films which most frequently do not observe the rules, they tend to reject this category of film.

It is impossible to solve this dilemma, but maybe it would be worth reminding:

— the ‘artists’, that film making remain a source of private profit and that the film workers are entitled to protect their salaries and their working conditions like any other workers.

— the film wage workers, that the problems of film cannot be confined solely to the interest of the professionals.

It is more complex to look at these problems with this contradiction in mind. The Estates General did not mark a renewed meeting of minds of film directors and film wage workers within their trade union. On the contrary, they were an attempt by these directors to bring the traditional film-makers to partake in the problems they face as directors, asking the traditional film-makers to join them in demands likely to develop the possibilities of creation, even if this served their material interests.

Yet, there are more and more people who want to make films, and the government's cultural policy leaves them little hope. This is why there is a risk of seeing a multiplication of these attempts which won't resolve anything in depth and may even be prejudicial to the film technicians' and film workers' interests. These attempts would become more dangerous if technicians and workers ignored the directors' legitimate aspirations and did not aim their reproaches at their real enemies: the Gaullist regime and its cultural policy as well as capitalism and its commodity-culture.

⁸⁹ Jean-André Fieschi & Bernard Stora, ‘Deux faces sur écran large’, *La Nouvelle Critique*, n° 21, February 1969, pp. 47-53.

This last point illustrates the *Nouvelle Critique*'s different perspective on the issue. Moving away from the strictly corporatist standpoint taken by many inside the film union or the Party, Fieschi and Stora recognise the difficulties encountered by aspiring or established film auteurs. Thus, they define the EGC as 'a movement of directors frustrated by the present system', the outcome of which resulted in 'two diametrically opposed positions'. On the one hand, the SRF represents 'a certain way to find a place in the system', on the other hand the development of a parallel cinema illustrated the will to find 'a way to negate the system'. After presenting parallel or marginal cinemas, the co-authors conclude that these new directions constituted 'now an important sector of French film-making'.⁹⁰ The following month, the same writers, joined by Jean-Patrick Lebel, continue their survey of parallel and marginal cinemas. They first describe the risk incurred by political parallel cinema of not finding its public, mostly because of the 'Romantic *gauchiste* liking for clandestine activities', which often results in the films being shown only to a public of initiates, and therefore missing their propagandistic raison d'être. Then they portray the obstacle race the young auteur must run in order to his or her film, blaming the producers for forcing the director to manage with minimal budgets so as to limit their eventual loss.⁹¹ The writers do not blame the directors but the system itself which allows for such 'auteur racketeering' and caution once more the film employees 'not to be mistaken as to who their real enemies are by accusing the auteurs of "ruining" the trade and taking part in whatever schemes possible in order to make their films'. For Fieschi, Lebel and Stora, while 'marginal films cannot escape from the contradictions' they have underlined, 'it is inconceivable that a quality marginal film should be barred from wider distribution.' They ask the film trade unions and the whole of

⁹⁰ Fieschi & Stora, 'Deux faces sur écran large', pp. 47-53.

⁹¹ 'The "courageous" producer, the "small independent producer" chooses a usually young director and gives him a small amount of money to make a reputedly "difficult" film, of problematic profitability. He tells him or her of the risks he takes by producing the film, patiently making himself up as a patron of the arts and making the young director understand that he/she will have to be reasonable and docile. Then, he stays in the background. It is the director who then contacts the technicians (generally friends), rallies them to his subject and explains to them the difficulties he is faced with, asking for their understanding. The crew is then hired at low wages. These are often insufficient, the work schedule is not respected, extra hours are not paid for, the collective labour agreement is often stretched. The film is launched at a small cost, and the producer hardly ever loses out', Jean-André Fieschi, Jean-Patrick Lebel and Bernard Stora, 'Cinéma parallèle', *La Nouvelle Critique*, n° 22, March 1969, pp. 68-70.

the film wage earners to look frankly at the serious problem which confronts both auteur films and parallel films. Their conclusion is indeed a strong defence of these categories of films: 'Parallel cinema does not resolve anything. Yet if it succeeds in ridding itself of its fantasies, in avoiding certain traps, certain pretensions, it might help to make clear that film has not yet reached its full potential, that it has existed, and still exists, according to Hollywood conceptions and that the death of cinema might be announced before it ever really came into existence.'⁹²

Thus, the importance of auteur cinema was not only recognised in critical terms but was also validated as a sector of the French film industry. Consequently, the positions of the *Fédération du spectacle* and those of the PCF no longer fully concurred. The range of views in the Party corresponded to the division within the industry as a whole, between the creative side of cinema and the 'executing' side, the film workforce. This was a difficult dichotomy to sustain for the Party of the working class, which saw a change of society as the only remedy. In 1972, The *Programme commun de gouvernement* (joint programme for government) was signed by the leaders of the three political organisations of the French Left, François Mitterrand for the Socialist Party, Robert Fabre for the Radicaux de Gauche (centre-left), and Georges Marchais — who had succeeded Waldeck Rochet when he was forced to retire for health reasons — for the PCF.⁹³ The cultural policy which this programme contains, largely inspired by the PCF's own programme, was supposed to solve the problems of French cinema by adopting the principle that culture was neither a commodity nor a luxury.⁹⁴ In the aftermath of Mitterrand's electoral defeat and Valéry Giscard d'Estaing's victory in May 1974, a collective of Communist directors and technicians — Charles Bitsch, Noël Burch, Jacques Comets, Guy Lecouvette, Daniel Wurhmann, Bernard

⁹² Ibid.

⁹³ Georges Marchais had been Secretary-General unofficially since June 1969 when Waldeck Rochet fell ill, and officially since February 1970 when he became Deputy Secretary-General. He was elected Secretary-General in December 1972, in Philippe Robrieux, *Histoire intérieure du Parti communiste*, 4 vols (Paris: Fayard, 1980-984), 4, pp. 806, 810 and 823.

⁹⁴ Parti Socialiste and Parti Communiste Français, 'La vie culturelle', *Programme Commun de Gouvernement* (Paris: Éditions Sociales, 1972), pp. 92-94; Parti Communiste Français, 'L'essor culturel', *Programme pour un gouvernement démocratique d'union populaire* (Paris: Éditions Sociales, 1971), pp. 95-102.

Stora, Jean-Patrick Lebel — issued *Cinéma: culture ou profit*, which emphasised the need for a radical change. The greater part of this 102-page booklet painstakingly describes what is wrong with French film in liberal Giscardian society. It is only in the last 17 pages that the writers spell out their proposals. The implementation of the *Programme commun* alone would bring new life to the French film trade, both in creative and industrial terms. It advocates a interventionist public policy of financial aid for film production with a view to facilitating a diversity of styles and genres, the limitation of the ownership of conglomerates, the end of censorship, and measures concerning film heritage and film education.⁹⁵ Needless to say these positions were rejected, like the Common Programme had been, by the far left as evidence of the PCF's reformism.⁹⁶ In the ideal society the Communist directors envisage, all cinema, be it entertainment cinema or avant-garde cinema, would be cultural and all films would answer their audience's cultural demands.⁹⁷ The Communist film policy following May '68 was a dual one. On the one hand it fully acknowledged the existence of different film-making practices, on the other it quite naturally kept a close eye on the film workforce's welfare. Its positions had become more refined than they had been in the past when the defence of national culture was almost the only motto. The belief that a 'Socialism in French colours' (*un socialisme aux couleurs de la France*) could become reality and that French cinema could be rid of its economic enslavement was ultimately belied. A generation later, the French film industry would still resound with cries for its survival and be even more divided than before. But this time, the PCF would speak in one voice (literally), resolutely choosing its camp.

⁹⁵ Collectif de cinéastes communistes, *Cinéma: culture ou profit* (Paris: Éditions de La Nouvelle Critique), 1975, pp. 86-96.

⁹⁶ 'Cinéma, culture ou profit?', *Cinéthique*, n° 23/24, 2nd semester 1977, pp. 87-90.

⁹⁷ *Cinéma: culture ou profit*, p. 99.

Chapter 6: Critical Reception: May '68

As I have shown in the previous chapter, the double nature of cinema, being both an industry and an art-form, largely informed the debate within the PCF as to what film policy the Party should adopt before, during and after the events of May '68. The discussions which took place between film professionals, auteurs, artists and technicians as to the respective places of auteur/independent cinema and mainstream cinema in terms of the industrial facet of the industry/art dichotomy necessarily had an impact on the positions adopted by the Communist critics. Obviously the emergence of a French political cinema will be central to the present chapter. In view of the political debate around '68 which took the French Marxist Left by storm, with the PCF in the eye of the cyclone, the French Communist critical positioning will be studied at length. But such an analysis needs first to examine the questions which were raised by the overall welcoming of the New Wave in the years that followed not only its coming into existence, but more pointedly its demise.

6.1. From the New Wave to May '68

It did not take long before the overall support the Communist critics gave to the New Wave came under the very same critics' scrutiny. For a few years, numerous articles bore signs of both the revaluation of the New Wave's directors' attitude as well as a reflection on what Communist criticism should be.¹ In other words, the manner the Communist critics embraced the new generation triggered a debate which had not really taken place before.

¹ See Cervoni, 'Le cinéma pour quoi faire', *France Nouvelle*, n° 1062, 23 February 1966, p. 20-21.

6.1.1. The Self-Questioning of the Communist Critical Reception of the New Wave

While the PCF's critics greeted the New Wave mostly in subjective terms, they also rejected the dogmatism which prevailed in their writings over most of the previous decade. Yet there seems to have been, during all these years, little theoretical discussion on the notion of Marxist criticism and on the position of the French Communists in this perspective. This debate started in the 1960s soon after the New Wave lost some of its shine.

Cervoni launched the discussion on the role of the critic, and thus replaced Sadoul as the central figure of French Communist criticism. For his part Sadoul continued his personal journey through French and world cinema. With Louis Marcorelles and Gene Moskowitz, under the aegis of the *Association française de la critique de cinéma*, he put in place the *Semaine de la Critique* at the Cannes Film Festival in 1962, keeping the open mind he had shown towards the New Wave.² Sadoul seems to have taken a back seat in the internal debate instigated by his younger disciple. This might be explained by the illness from which the film historian suffered and which led to his untimely death in October 1967.³

In 1964, Albert Cervoni issued a long analysis on the role of the critic which contains the main questions the Communist critics were faced with. This fascinating document was unpublished and therefore is worth reproducing at length. It contains most of the issues which will be raised in the present chapter.

It is quite obvious that criticism ought to be objective, to refuse all a priori. It is no less obvious that being objective does not mean in any way being passively neutral, quite the opposite. In that sense, one may even say that Communist criticism is and will be the only one capable to be objective through and through. It is the only criticism which can appreciate a film as much in terms of its general orientation, its intentions as in terms of every aspect of its execution and therefore of its definitive content.

In this respect, I believe it is no longer necessary to insist on the absolute obligation of not dissociating the study of the significance of a film and the study of its

² See Antoine de Baecque, *Cahiers du cinéma. Histoire d'une revue, II. Cinéma: tours et détours* (Paris: Éditions de l'étoile, 1991), p. 161.

³ The Communist press, and in particular *Les Lettres françaises*, published many articles and personal testimonies on Georges Sadoul's death. Among them are the personal messages coming from New Wave directors — Agnès Varda; 'Now my two 'film uncles' are dead (André Bazin and Georges Sadoul)', *Les Lettres françaises*, n° 1204, 18-26 October 1967, p. 15; Louis Malle: 'I remember that Sadoul wholeheartedly chose to like us and to make others like us, chose to understand us and to help others understand us', *L'Humanité*, 18 October 1967.

organisation. According to Gramsci, form and content are merely successive stages in the making up of a work of art, and for Eisenstein, form is the way by which content operates.

From this perspective, to neglect examining and criticising a film in terms of aesthetics by merely looking at its content simply would be an aberration. It would mean going back to the kind of criticism Plekhanov's narrow-minded sociologism used to inspire, to that dogmatism which transformed politics into a sort of science of sciences, a Procrustean bed for every dimension of criticism, whatever they are.

We should be wary of misusing vocabulary. It is inappropriate to consider the notion of subject-matter equivalent to that of content. This leads to making no distinction between intentions and result. In my view, the subject-matter is only the first step of a project whose content will be finalised only through its realisation and final making processes.

In other words, the dichotomy between form and content is bound to give way to some serious ideological confusion, in the way it would be quite wrong to think that a philosophy could be endowed with an authentically materialist content without an authentically dialectical form to match.

This leads us to some complementary remarks. First, the aesthetic study of our critics ought to go beyond impressionist considerations on the presence or the lack of pleasure in the way a film is made. In other words, it must go beyond a simply formalist appreciation of the work. Then, this direction of work must guide the way we select our articles. Films which do not engage in political subjects have a political dimension nevertheless. [...]

All things being equal, the relative and contradictory phenomenon which was given the name of New Wave posed to Communist critics problems as thorny as those the policy of left-wing union did to the grassroots of our party, if one believes that to be in favour of left-wing union does not imply in any way giving up one's critical viewpoints.

To deny, to reject the contribution of the New Wave would have meant cutting ourselves off from a true movement which was aiming at breaking away from the fossilised academicism of the Fourth Republic. It would have meant also allowing the rise of a dangerous right-wing opposition, a sort of critical Poujadism asking for the status quo. On the other hand to welcome the New Wave, without a critical distance, in a fundamentally unchanged socio-political context, meant taking the risk of falling into a kind of leftist Poujadism, opposing 'young' cinema to 'old' cinema on a basis which had more to do with fashion than objective analysis, a hasty rallying to some kind of Defferism, so to speak.⁴

In these conditions, it might be interesting for us to look at the reasons why the New Wave has been so incoherent, short-lived and so soon brought down by a system of production which it intended to adapt to rather than do away with. Using as close a political language as possible to make myself clear, I think that it would be worth exploring how reformist the New Wave was in its approach to film making, with the advances this meant compared to a simply conservative and reactionary practice but also with the shortcomings and the dangers contained in any false solution, or at best, in any partial solution.

Advocating low budgets, the New Wave permitted the shooting of more personal, more individualistic films, at least in the beginning, but ipso facto prevented more important projects from coming to light, consequently narrowing the range of French film production. Practically, it sanctioned the social recruitment of the film professions in an often liberal upper middle class. By the same token, quite logically, it restricted the themes of French cinema to private issues such as might be experienced by young bourgeois, who happen sometimes to be sensitive and intelligent but who have no real

⁴ Gaston Defferre was a member of SFIO and *député-maire* for Marseilles. He was the advocate of a wide political alliance with the Centre.

contact with the extent and the number of the economic, political, cultural and moral problems encountered by the majority of the French population in their social life.

Hence, the criticism that French cinema is only concerned with subjects and situations irrelevant to a French audience at large. This is echoed in a survey carried out by the CGT. in work councils, brought to our attention by Comrade Krasucki. While it would have been a mistake to turn a blind eye on the relative improvement brought about by the New Wave, we didn't need to give in — as we all did to some extent — to the temptation of unity at all costs, which in turn lead to excessive herd instinct.

Yet in terms of general recruitment within the industry, average subject-matters used as criteria for film scenarios, various official and unofficial censorship, we cannot but notice the most extreme social inequality, the under-representation of the salaried workers in their daily life with their real social and private problems, in French films.

This brings me to my second point. It would be both inept and preposterous to reproach a Alain Resnais or a Louis Malle with not tackling the condition of the proletariat, knowing their individual background and the infrastructures of production. As a point of illustration, it would be absurd and unfair to blame Malle for his depicting bourgeois characters in their sentimental or professional life instead of urban working-classes and small peasantry. *Les Amants* and *Le Feu Follet* benefited from first hand experience. I am afraid that, had Malle decided to portray miners and metal-workers, we would have been in for some nasty surprises.

For us popular culture must not be identified with cheap literature, with a diminished popular culture in comparison to a higher quality culture destined for a so-called elite. The real distribution difficulties should not authorise any concession in this respect. We should also, and as much as possible underline what is positive, what allows a progression of mind: the universalism of *Hiroshima mon amour* or the criticism of daily bourgeois life present in *Muriel* but also make clear that these films are relatively remote from the daily life of the majority of the French population. We should also underline in *Alphaville* an interesting and angst-ridden interrogation of the electronic and atomic age in the bourgeois world but we should also warn our readers against the film's confusionist danger of seeing everything through the eyes of the reporter of *Figaro-Pravda* and in a world where Communism and Capitalism would not seem to differ. Let the predominantly anti-Communist, rambling gauchiste cretins call Godard a fascist. Having said that, while we should note Godard's real talent, the quality of many of his concrete observations, we should also point to the limitations due to his confusionist and insufficient political culture.

To resume this long analysis, it seems to me that a coherent attitude on the Communist critics' part may allow us both to recover the loss of credibility which resulted from former schematic and dogmatic ways of proceeding, and to promote the Party's interest as well as the interests of a truly popular culture. Both of which are intimately connected. we are all, I believe, convinced of this and, as Communists, we are convinced that film criticism, well understood, is a means to continue politics through other means.⁵

Cervoni's programmatic text is symptomatic of the situation of Communist criticism in the mid-1960s for a number of reasons. First, by reappraising the relationship between form and content, by refusing to dissociate the two, it seems to put the last nail in the coffin of the dogmatic kind of criticism which prevailed in the 1950s and which is described as 'narrow-minded' and 'ideologically confused'. Zhdanovist criticism is a thing of the past. All the

⁵ Letter dated June 1965, addressed to Georges Sadoul by Gaston Plissonier, a member of the Party's political bureau, which contains Cervoni's document, Paris, BIFI, Sadoul Archives, GS-D 10.

same, Cervoni stresses that it should not be replaced by a merely 'impressionistic critique', which, he writes, characterised the reception of the New Wave. Cervoni's revaluation of the New Wave and its Communist reception echoes the strong anti-New Wave reaction from Communist film professionals, as seen in the previous chapter. It could be said therefore that part of his argument seems to take into account the criticism which came from the professional quarters of the film industry. Yet Cervoni's presentation cannot conceal the obvious difficulties of reconciling the two sides of cinema: film as popular culture, and film as a more demanding art-form. As I shall examine, Cervoni himself was at the core of a controversy within the Party about the merits or the shortcomings of some extremely popular films. While he criticises the New Wave as a whole for depicting situations which are too remote from the life of most of the working population, he acknowledges the right of the artist to do so, the right of the film directors to choose and shoot whatever they want. According to Cervoni, their work may be criticised on ideological grounds, but their talent or individual expression should also be recognised and praised when they deserve these praises: Godard is a good director and should be defended even though Communists may not necessarily agree with him. In fact, Cervoni's text bears the seeds of the somewhat ambiguous position some film critics will find themselves in in the years to come, in particular around and after May '68. On the one hand, the recognition of the artist's freedom of expression prefigures the Central Committee of Argenteuil in March 1966, which will lay down the basis of a new French Communist policy towards intellectuals and artists. On the other, the insistence on the formal aspect of cinema, i.e. on the filmic text itself, may be read as an early sign of what will happen later when the Communist monthly *La Nouvelle Critique* and the *Tel Quel* group will momentarily come together. This chapter will look at the period between the Central Committee of Argenteuil in 1966 and the aftermath of the collapse of the rather short-lived community of mind which existed between *Tel Quel*, *Cahiers du cinéma* and *La Nouvelle Critique* which occurred early in the 1970s. Obviously May '68 constitutes the mid-point of this five year period, as well as the central focus of this chapter. The emergence of a political cinema in France and the way the PCF reacted to the

diverse forms this new trend took will be examined without losing sight that these films remained a minority group within the realm of French cinema. In a period when Marxist theory came to the fore with a vengeance, how did French Communist critics respond to this new configuration? Was their response uniform or were there trends and diverging currents within the ranks of Communist critics?

6.1.2. The Central Committee of Argenteuil, March 1966

Marked throughout the 1950s by a strongly ideological standpoint, the French Communist attitude towards intellectuals and artists needed to be brought up to date. Many events had taken place since Laurent Casanova's address to the Party's intellectuals.⁶ Yet there had been no formal recognition of the PCF's new stance on cultural matters since, although in effect, the views and opinions expressed by Communist intellectuals for a number of years had shown their rejection of the dogmatic line which had prevailed until then.⁷ Although in 1964 the 17th Congress of the PCF started looking back more critically at the Party's past relation to the arts, albeit not without some resistance, it is not until 1966 that a Central Committee of the Party met specifically to discuss the Party's cultural philosophy.⁸ This meeting, which took place on 11 to 13 March 1966, marked the real turning point in the PCF's conception of cultural matters. Argenteuil was the outcome of a correcting process — it marked the official recognition of past errors on the part of the PCF's direction —, as well as the confirmation of a new strategy of alliance with other left-wing parties and organisations. The Central Committee was designed to put an end to the dogmatism of the Zhdanovist 1950s which led

⁶ See chapter 2, pp. 98-99.

⁷ As shown in chapter 4.

⁸ 'What the Party's action can be blamed for during this period is not having sufficiently analysed the existing cultural movements and the dialectics which could or ought to have animated them. Zhdanov's definition has been detrimental to us. The idea that there are mechanical links between art and politics, that art has directly political effects is a false idea. This cannot be stressed enough. But Socialist Realism has led some positive results. More and more artists find their inspiration in an analysis of history', Jean-Pierre Jouffroy, Numéro spécial XVII^e Congrès du PCF, *Cahiers du Communisme*, n° 6-7, June-July 1964, pp. 150-161. Although Jouffroy admits that a sufficient analysis of the existing cultural movements was lacking and that the party's perspective was excessively dogmatic and not dialectical enough, he nevertheless reaffirms the interest of Socialist Realism. He even goes as far as claiming that, in terms of ideas, the successes of Socialist Realism can be witnessed all around them. In a rethorical somersault, the Parisian delegate manages both to blame Zhdanov's argument for having caused great damage to the Party and hail its successes.

to an isolation of the PCF from many intellectuals and artists. Now that the Party's policy called for a union of the French Left, this was a necessary move. As Roger Geerlandt puts it, 'Argenteuil was not a theoretical discussion but essentially a political discussion. The political preoccupations — first of all the necessity of an alliance between the working-class and the intellectuals — have been decisive in the outcome of the Central Committee.'⁹ Given the importance in France of the '*intellectuels engagés*', it was essential that the intellectuals would not be left out of the new Party's policy for a united Left. This required a certain degree of self-criticism as well as a clear statement acknowledging the intellectuals' and the artists' fundamental freedom and autonomy. This was in essence what Waldeck Rochet declared to Radio-Luxembourg, making clear the political dimension of Argenteuil:

We are trying to bring out the ways and means of a further development of Marxist theory in the view of the important changes of our time. Our theory is not a collection of fixed dogmas but a theory which is enriched by the development of the struggle of the working class as well as the developments of science and technique. This endeavour aims at making the Party as a whole, and in particular intellectuals within the Party, better armed for fulfilling their increasing responsibilities. It also aims at conducting a dialogue with Socialists, Christians and everyone for whom the future of this country is an issue, with an *esprit de principe* which does not exclude an openness to ideas. Thus the workings of the Central Committee, dealing with social, political or ideological issues were dominated by the constant view of achieving the union of the working class and the democrats.¹⁰

André Stil, who, as director of *L'Humanité* in the 1950s and recipient of the 1952 Stalin prize, knew a thing or two about dogmatism and party-line, explains that this new standpoint does not mean the abandonment of the PCF's previous positions, in other words, it does not imply that the PCF had been wrong until then.¹¹ What the Argenteuil resolution did acknowledge is that the PCF had not been receptive enough to what had happened around it, and it underlined the need to understand and accept the Party's necessary evolution. This should not be considered as 'opportunism' while adherence to former beliefs were not

⁹ Roger Geerlandt, *Garaudy et Althusser* (Paris: Presses Universitaires de France, 1978), p. 131.

¹⁰ Waldeck Rochet, 'Declaration to Radio-Luxembourg', 13 March 1966, in *Cahiers du Communisme*, n° 5-6, p. 58.

¹¹ André Stil was awarded the Stalin literary prize in 1952 for *Le Premier Choc*.

necessarily 'dogmatic'.¹² For Stil, 'a wide understanding of everything which is happening, or experimented in terms of artistic production does not constitute necessarily a mark of opportunism nor is the backing of politically-based artistic production necessarily a sign of dogmatism. It is only when these two aspects are accepted that the Party's policy will achieve a real degree of openness.'¹³ The final resolution of the Central Committee states that, in the scientific domain, the PCF 'will not impose a ready-made truth nor interfere in the existing debates among specialists', and that in the artistic domain, the Party 'appreciates and supports the diverse contributions of the artists to the progress of human kind while acknowledging their imagination, taste and originality'.¹⁴ As Michael Kelly puts it, 'the policy of non-interference in science, philosophy and culture did not exclude political intervention on political issues, but it formalised the substantial autonomy which intellectuals enjoyed in pursuing their specialist interests.'¹⁵

Despite this rather broad and consensual outcome, the debates which took place in Argenteuil were also marked by the discussions which opposed the Party's two leading philosophers, Roger Garaudy and Louis Althusser.¹⁶ Kelly stresses the political antagonism which separated the two thinkers: 'In basing so much of his analysis on Mao Tse-tung Althusser nailed a Left flag to the mast, whereas Garaudy was busily destalinising and at the same time moving rapidly to the Right. In terms of the international Communist movement, Garaudy sympathised with the Italians, Althusser with the Chinese. In terms of pragmatic politics, Garaudy's programme led to a policy of broad alliance, almost at any price, to the point of opportunism; Althusser's led to a policy of uncompromising independent action, almost at all costs, to the point of sectarianism.'¹⁷

¹² André Stil, 'Le Parti et la création littéraire et artistique', Débats sur les Problèmes Idéologiques et Culturels — Comité Central du Parti Communiste Français, Argenteuil, 11, 12, 13 Mars 1966, in *Cahiers du Communisme*, n° 5-6, pp. 53-68.

¹³ Ibid.

¹⁴ Parti Communiste Français, *Un Sacré bout de chemin*, Supplément *Cahiers du Communisme*, n° 11, November 1970, p. 98.

¹⁵ Michael Kelly, *French Marxism Today* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1982), p. 178.

¹⁶ The confrontation had started a few months earlier in a previous meeting at Choisy-le-Roy during the 'Journées d'étude des philosophes communistes', *ibid.*, p. 142.

¹⁷ 'Within the French Communist Party, Althusser has represented an aggressive and polarising tendency which sharply counterposes itself to that represented successively by Lefebvre and Garaudy. On a philosophical level he proposes a rigorous and sharply defined theoretical view against their woolly catch-all

The various aspects of the Argenteuil debates would have a lasting effect on the PCF's position towards intellectuals and artists. It affected particularly the Communist press where the journalists and columnists could enjoy a new degree of freedom, although this was not obvious in all the Party's journals. In terms of film criticism and theory, the Argenteuil meeting would have a double significance for the Communist critics. On the one hand, and in the shorter term, it opened a larger debate about the role of the critics; on the other hand, and in the longer term, the Garaudy/Althusser clash would be central to the post-May '68 debate among Marxist film specialists, and Althusser would become a central figure in the realm of film theory in France. I shall address the short term effects first and then move to the post May '68 period.

6.1.3. The Questioning of the Film Critic's Role

Following Argenteuil, the role of the film critic had to be re-evaluated since the artists and consequently the film directors or auteurs could no longer be judged merely on ideological grounds. The previous chapter has shown how such a non-ideological criticism had in fact started with the New Wave. Cervoni's 1964 analysis confirmed this and raised both the issue of the artist's autonomy and that of a truly Communist critical approach, which had not taken place during the New Wave. In the months which followed Argenteuil, the film critics' role and place were discussed in the Party's press. Notwithstanding the vehemence with which some critics vilified their peers, the discussion on the merits or disadvantages of individual over collective criticism for instance did not reach any conclusion. Film critics reproached the New Wave for not having been more political in its approach and blamed themselves for not having underlined this point sufficiently. In a series of articles, the first of which appeared in the first issue of the revamped Party's cultural monthly *La Nouvelle Critique*, Cervoni

ecumenism. His is a professional, almost technical approach, impatient with imprecision and thoroughly convinced of its own rectitude. Theirs is a broad, humanistic approach, geared to exploring convergences with other thought systems and open to the assimilation of whatever insights they offer.' For Michael Kelly the differences went beyond a mere question of generation, 'it was also a difference of social base: both appealed to intellectuals, understood in a broad sense, but while Garaudy addressed writers, artists, teachers, and the liberal professions, Althusser addressed social scientists, students and the new white-collar occupations which the scientific and technological revolution were rapidly generating', Kelly, pp. 140-141.

questions the role of film critics, calling for a 'collective' kind of film criticism, different from the type of film criticism practised by *Le Nouvel Observateur*'s Michel Cournot, whom Cervoni describes as the last of the impressionistic critics.¹⁸ It is as if, following Argenteuil, the recently accepted autonomy of the artist had to be counter-balanced by a more rigorous critique. Two months later, two Marxist critics, Jean-Marc Aucuy and Gérard Gozlan, whose presence in the pages of *La Nouvelle Critique* is significant in view of some of his earlier positions in *Positif*, also discuss the place of the critics.¹⁹ Aucuy's point of view is interesting. He used to work for *La Nouvelle Critique* in the early 1960s and also wrote in the film journal, *Miroir du cinéma*.²⁰ The Marxist film journal, *Miroir du cinéma*, seems to have gathered critics close to the PCF, but who disagreed with Sadoul's kind of critical ecumenism.²¹ For instance they rejected Godard in terms which could have been found in the columns of *Positif*, but they did not lash out at the Communist critics who were sympathetic to the New Wave directors as *Positif* did.²² In April 1967, Godard is still a point of contention: Aucuy warns of the danger of having 'Red Guards reigning over French film criticism', alluding to the fact that Godard was suddenly more popular among film critics as a result of the rallying call of 'a great voice', namely Aragon. Gozlan advocates the idea of a collective critique as 'the rational use of the competence and knowledge of each individual'.²³ *La Nouvelle Critique* published Cournot's answer to Cervoni's article. For Cournot, 'fulsome praise has become the number one criteria of film criticism: everything is praised, *L'Humanité* praises even *La Grande Vadrouille*, noxious scouts' films like *Les Aventuriers* or simply really bad films.' He singles out Cervoni as the only one left with some rigour but regrets that 'he does not watch films very well and does not know how to

¹⁸ Albert Cervoni, 'Les créateurs, le public et Cournot', *La Nouvelle Critique*, n°181 bis, January 1967/n°1 February 1967, pp. 58-59.

¹⁹ See chapter 4, pp. 162-63.

²⁰ *Miroir du cinéma*, n° 1, March 1962. The editorial committee was composed of Jean-Louis Pays, Francis Gendron, Jean Dedieu and Pierre David.

²¹ For instance when Thorez died *Miroir du cinéma* published an article entitled 'Maurice Thorez est mort, les créateurs sont en deuil', n° 10-11, 4th quarter 1964, p. 41.

²² See 'Godard ne passera pas', *Miroir du cinéma*, n° 12-13, 4th quarter 1965.

²³ Cervoni, Jean-Marc Aucuy & Gérard Gozlan, 'Débat sur la critique', *La Nouvelle Critique*, n° 3, April 1967, pp. 46-47.

write'.²⁴ While he attacks Moussinac and Bazin, Cournot considers that Lachize in *L'Humanité* or Marcel Martin in *Les Lettres françaises* enjoy an extremely comfortable situation.²⁵ Cervoni is prompt to reply, defending Bazin and Sadoul. The first for having denounced, before the Communists, the excessive cult of personality in *The fall of Berlin*; Sadoul for being able to admit having been wrong about, and changing his mind about, John Huston.²⁶ Daquin joins in this rather sterile debate with the groundbreaking statement that a film first provokes an emotional shock and that it is only after this shock has been experienced that a collective critical reflection can take place. This discussion, which went on for a couple of months, did not lead to any significant change in the writings of the Communist critics. At the time such a debate was taking place, the issue of political cinema was not fully on the map and the discussions which took place before the watershed of May '68 somehow rang hollow because it was not accompanied by any sound theoretical work: the debate on the critics' impressionism was itself impressionistic. Yet it also underlined a certain uneasiness, a recognition that, somehow, they were not fulfilling their role as Communist critics. The issue had been raised, but it was not until after May '68 that a truly political cinema became an important constituent of French cinema. The term 'political cinema' refers to different film types: it designates far left collective productions, epitomised by Godard's Dziga Vertov period, as well as mainstream cinema with a political subject-matter, such as Costa-Gavras' *Z*. Therefore it is only in the aftermath of May '68 that this uneasiness would be transformed into something more productive, i.e. that a truly Marxist reflection on film, film criticism and film theory would take place, not least in the Communist press. But before turning our attention to this debate as well as to the political cinema which emerged after the May events, it is necessary to look at what continued to attract the great majority of the French audience — mainstream cinema — and the way it was received at the time by the Communist critics.

²⁴ Jean-Louis Pays, 'Interview with Michel Cournot: Michel Cournot nous déclare', *La Nouvelle Critique*, n° 4, May 1967, pp. 40-42.

²⁵ 'pètent de confort', an expression difficult to translate.

²⁶ Cervoni, 'En défense de la fonction critique', *La Nouvelle Critique*, n° 5, June 1967, pp. 52-53. See also the internal Communist director leaflet, *Le Clap*, appendice 9, pp. 371-73.

6.1.4. Box office hits in and around May '68

Even though political films in the broadest sense of the word appeared after May '68, this should not hide the fact that the great majority of the public continued to prefer comedies and big blockbusters, be they French or American. The high-brow theoretical debate which was taking place, and was keeping the Marxist film specialists busy, had little influence on the vast majority of French film-goers. The heavy-going discussions which agitated the French Marxist film circles and the type of film-making they advocated could not be further from the films which attracted the French public. Indeed it would be wrong to overemphasise the effect of the theoretical effervescence following May '68 on actual film-making and film-going habits. Throughout the 1960s and 1970s, although audiences declined, the comedy genre remained particularly successful in France. During this period, comedians like Louis de Funès, Bourvil and Les Charlots appeared regularly at the top of popularity charts. These comedies were classically made, with straightforward plots. For many, they were a good example of the French film industry's savoir-faire. Moreover their immense popular success seemed to demonstrate that the French were able to equal and better the allegedly unsurpassable Hollywood appeal. In a way, these comedies vindicated the view of the film professionals that French people did not go to the cinema to see petit-bourgeois intellectuals' *états d'âme* or narcissistic low-budget stories but would rather enjoy a good family comedy with comedians they adore. The anti-intellectual dimension of this argument is obvious and the Communist reception of these films is interesting to study since the PCF claims to be the voice of the French working-class. Once more the difficulties faced by a party which defined itself both as a mass party and the spokesperson of the revolutionary avant-garde of the working class became all too apparent. The Communist reception of the highly successful French comedies of the 1960s and 1970s is marked by a certain uneasiness.²⁷ While some

²⁷ Here is the box-office for the period 1964-1969: *La Grande Vadrouille*, Gérard Oury, 17 226 000; *Once Upon a Time in the West*, Sergio Leone, 1969, 14 788 000; *The Jungle Book*, Wolfgang Reitherman, 1969: 12 507 000; *Le Corniaud*, Gérard Oury, 1965, 11 724 000; *Doctor Jivago*, David Lean, 1966, 9 801 000; *Les Grandes Vacances*, Jean Girault, 1967, 6 947 000; *Le Gendarme se marie*, Jean Girault, 1968, 6 786 000, in Yves Allion, 'Le feuilleton du cinéma, (I)', *La Revue du cinéma*, May 1991, pp. 68-69.

critics seem to have endorsed these productions wholeheartedly, others were reluctant to condone films which they did not consider great additions to French film art. Throughout the 1960s, Jean Girault's *Gendarme* series, which started off in 1964 with *Le Gendarme de Saint Tropez*, consistently attracted a large audience, thanks first and foremost to its star, Louis de Funès. Set for the most part in the fashionable star-studded Riviera sea resort, Saint Tropez, the series gently and humorously ridicules the police force in typical Gallic fashion. In a country led by a general, the antics of de Funès and his subordinates who conveyed silliness and stupidity with uncanny naturalness, proved highly popular. In *Les Lettres françaises*, Pascal Brienne welcomed *Le Gendarme à Saint Tropez*: 'There is not much in it, but only a kill-joy would hold it against the film, Jean Girault's potboiler film is pretty well made.'²⁸ Edmond Gilles in *L'Humanité* finds *Le Gendarme à New York*, the next film in the series, 'hilarious', while he deplores that the film is 'still far from the really French style of comedy everyone wishes for', a style which he actually fails to define.²⁹ Interestingly, Louis Chauvet's review of the film for *Le Figaro* contains also a hint of nationalism, as well as a dig at auteur cinema: 'Those who cry today that audiences are vanishing praised to the sky films which did not deserve half this praise. They triggered this rush towards traditional entertainers. Without being nationalistic, frankly, aren't de Funès's funny faces worth any of Jerry Lewis's?'³⁰ The next one, *Le Gendarme se marie*, which had the best French box office in 1968 (an exorcism of the CRS?), was also rather well received by *L'Humanité*'s critic. Lachize has not yet grown tired of the *Gendarmes* series. In his review, he praises 'the craftsmanship of a director who does not betray his public', while acknowledging both that Girault is unable to achieve the standard of Hollywood comedies and that de Funès's audiences know what to expect.³¹ For his part, François Maurin in *L'Humanité Dimanche*, raises the issue of films which, since they attract a massive amount of spectators, are detrimental to most of the remaining productions. This is

²⁸ Pascal Brienne, 'Pandore chez les yé-yé', *Les Lettres françaises*, 17 September 1964, p. 9.

²⁹ *L'Humanité*, 24 November 1965.

³⁰ *Le Figaro*, 3 November 1965.

³¹ Samuel Lachize, 'Les pépères tranquilles', *L'Humanité*, 16 November 1968.

why he prefers to write about Philippe Fourastié's *La Bande à Bonnot*, an auteur film, rather than *Le Gendarme se marie*, a 'finite product based on de Funès's standardised mimics, which, for him, deserves minimal critical interest.³² Maurin's point is interesting as it reflects a pro-auteur attitude which would gain momentum and is very much at the core of today's French Communist film criticism, as shall be seen in chapter 8. Even Lachize eventually lost patience with the *Gendarmes*. He finds *Le Gendarme en balade*, released in 1970, extremely heavy and an illustration of the way French cinema works: 'It is not I who is contemptuous of the audience, not the clown, not even Jean Girault. What is despicable is the way the system works. French films are poor because they are relaxing, quasi soporific. Rare are the producers who show real courage and dignity.'³³ In the 1970s, Les Charlots, an ex-pop music group turned film actors, became France's most popular comedians while their films were among the biggest grossers.³⁴ *L'Humanité-Dimanche* does not find them particularly refined but thinks that they deliver the laughs, and Tristan Renaud, in *Les Lettres françaises* finds Les Charlots efficiently funny, but, alluding to the filmic career of the Beatles, thinks that 'Les Charlots need to find their own Lester in order for them to make a lasting mark on French comedy.'³⁵ This type of criticism does not seem to have been affected by any real Marxist considerations. A certain weariness on the critics' part appears to creep in after May '68 but nowhere are these films described as bourgeois propaganda or ideologically flawed. The theoretical debate which was taking place elsewhere in the Communist press did not reach the Party's general press or else reached it in a very subdued form. The following example may explain why.

The reception of Gérard Oury's *La Grande Vadrouille* offers a good illustration of the three main difficulties Communist critics had to face in the 1960s: the difficulty to relate to their readers, the difficulty to relate to their editors and the difficulty to be true to themselves.

³² *L'Humanité-Dimanche*, 16 November 1968.

³³ 'Oublier Saint-Tropez', *L'Humanité-Dimanche*, n° 296, 8 November 1970.

³⁴ For the period 1970-74, *The Aristocats*, Wolfgang Reitherman, 1971; *Emmanuelle*, Just Jaeckin, 1974; *Les Bidasses en folie*, Claude Zidi, 1971. Yves Allion, 'Le feuilleton du cinéma, (II)', *La Revue du cinéma*, n° 472, June 1991, pp. 65-70.

³⁵ *L'Humanité Dimanche*, 5 January 1972; *Les Lettres françaises*, 29 December 1971-4 January 1972, p. 11.

Gérard Oury's 1965 comedy *Le Corniaud*, starring Louis de Funès and Bourvil, was warmly praised by Lachize in *L'Humanité*. For Lachize, *Le Corniaud* was 'a pleasing attempt to give to French cinema what it lacked most: a true sense of humour, devoid of any vulgarity and easy tricks'. This 'masterly first opus' shows that 'a considerable amount of work was put into it, [...] It is not a pretentious film, it only aims at entertaining people, and it does so with elegance and tenderness, so perfectly that one comes out of it feeling very happy.'³⁶ Lachize unreservedly welcomes Oury's film but is careful to point out that he is talking exclusively about mainstream cinema. A note mentions that 'people like Jacques Tati, Pierre Étaix and a few others are obvious exceptions' in the French comedy genre but do not belong to mainstream cinema. Commercial and industrial considerations therefore are not absent from Lachize's review. Eighteen months later the reception of Oury's *La Grande Vadrouille*, a Resistance comedy starring De Funès and Bourvil, will not only underline a split among Communist critics but also the difficulties experienced by some of them in asserting their independence of mind in relation to the overall cultural policy of their Party.

In *L'Humanité*, Lachize is enthusiastic about the film: '*La Grande Vadrouille* is a great French comedy, the best in this difficult genre', and 'it would be silly to snub it'. Adopting a language reminiscent of the 1950s type of Communist criticism, Lachize praises the two main characters who although they are 'not courageous nor daring, will become heroes because audacity and courage belong to those who love life, friendship, solidarity and peace'. Describing the film as 'warmly humanist', Lachize considers that 'American comedies, the best in the world, have found their rival'.³⁷ The reference to American cinema shows once more the corporatist angle of his review: French comedies must compete against Hollywood. Lachize's argument does not contain any reflection on the filmic characteristics of *La Grande Vadrouille*, nor does it analyse it in any political or ideological light. Similarly *Les Lettres françaises* printed a good review to *La Grande Vadrouille* by Michel Capdenac who, after referring to the figures of Mack Sennett or Laurel and Hardy, considers that the film reconciles *comique de situation* with burlesque poetry. For both Capdenac and Lachize, *La*

³⁶ Lachize, 'Le vrai rire: *Le Corniaud* de Gérard Oury', *L'Humanité*, 27 March 1965.

³⁷ Lachize, 'Drôlement troussé', *L'Humanité*, 10 December 1966.

Grande Vadrouille, in its own way, advocates a certain form of courage and friendship.³⁸ Diametrically opposed to Lachize's and Capdenac's opinion, Cervoni's review in *France Nouvelle*, condemns the film through and through.³⁹ Cervoni does not beat about the bush, for him *La Grande Vadrouille* is 'a very bad film, a crime against intelligence. It is as stupid, as vulgar and as obscene as the most stupid bourgeois boulevard theatre [...] The actors are bad, the direction is non-existent, lacking the Hollywood inspiration Oury so poorly tries to imitate [...] Moreover it is a racist film.' Cervoni is shocked by the way both the French and the Germans are depicted, and, like Claude Mauriac in the right-wing *Figaro littéraire*, regrets that 'the Nazi occupation and the Resistance are simply a pretext for clowning. The film is an insult to the public. A film like Oury's raises the question of the direction French productions are taking.'⁴⁰ Cervoni refutes the idea that the future of French cinema rests on this type of films: 'The industrial future of French cinema cannot be satisfying if its cultural merits are not taken into account, even for escapist films. The success of such expensive films is not guaranteed, the public may well turn soon to mediocre television programmes. And it is the theatres showing such films which are closing down whereas the new theatres are those which show a different type of cinema, a cinema of higher quality.'⁴¹ Cervoni's reviews reveals a certain degree of tension among Communist critics. He seems to be getting impatient and dissatisfied with the critique practised in *L'Humanité* and *L'Humanité Dimanche* which is seemingly dictated by trade motives. How was his critique received by his readers who, after all, made up the audience of these big box-office hits? His harsh review of *La Grande Vadrouille* did not go unnoticed. Two weeks later, *France Nouvelle* published readers' letters which, all except one, disagree with Cervoni's position. Most of them find Cervoni's condemnation of the film excessive and shocking. Marcel P. ..., a

³⁸ Michel Capdenac, 'La source du comique', *Les Lettres françaises*, 15-21 December 1966, p. 33.

³⁹ Cervoni, 'Les anti-Corniaud, a very bad film: *La Grande Vadrouille*; two important films: *Les Professionnels* et *Le Père Noël a les yeux bleus*', *France Nouvelle*, n° 1107, 4 January 1967. On readers's response to the critics' review, see also Jeannine Verdès-Leroux, *Le Réveil des somnanbules — Le Parti communiste, les intellectuels et la culture [1956-1985]* (Paris: Fayard/Minuit, 1987), pp. 317-318.

⁴⁰ Claude Mauriac, *Le Figaro littéraire*, 15 December 1966.

⁴¹ Cervoni's argument might be a little bit ingenuous. Some of the commercial movie-theatres closed because they were extremely well located and therefore could sell at a very high price. See Alan Williams, *Republic of Images* (Cambridge, Mass. and London: Harvard University Press, 1994 (1992)).

railroad worker from Pantin, who speaks as a 'local militant', is surprised and astounded. He went to see *La Grande Vadrouille* with his family and had a jolly good time. He is also disturbed by the fact that *France Nouvelle*, *L'Humanité* (n° 6961) and *La Vie ouvrière* (n° 1165) differ in their appreciation of the film. He calls for the critics to 'adopt the same criterion' before concluding with the following remark: 'If [Cervoni] does not want to have a good laugh now and then, he should at least try not to influence his comrades' feelings so forcefully.'⁴² M. R.P. from Pré-St-Gervais, cannot understand Cervoni's position since he and ten other comrades are happy 'to have spent two hours laughing at the cinema'. However, the following week, *France Nouvelle* published two letters in favour of Cervoni, one of them commenting on Cervoni's 'courage' for writing 'Les Anti-Corniaud'.⁴³ The editorial committee added its own comment at the end of the letter: 'We have had the opportunity in the past to tell Cervoni that some of his articles were written, in terms of form as well as content, more for a specialist or knowledgeable type of reader rather than for the majority of our readers. Therefore we agree with the remarks exposed in the letters we have published. For our part, we have made the remark that the subject of the article was perhaps inappropriate for the issue of the journal due to come out on the opening day of the PCF's 18th Congress. Also the way the spectators were dealt with was wrong as they only go to see the film to have a good time, not to see a masterpiece.'⁴⁴

The following week, *France Nouvelle* issued another statement which says that there have been letters criticising the weekly's criticism of Cervoni.⁴⁵ This self criticism — 'A correspondent rightly points that a critic does not have to promote a film if his knowledge and his experience tell him that it is a vulgar and demagogic production, even though the public seems to like it.' — is symptomatic of the difficulties experienced by some in adjusting to the post-Argenteuil era: 'Some of our correspondents express the fear that our remarks went contrary to the decisions taken at the Central Committee of Argenteuil and after the 18th

⁴² 'A propos du film *La Grande Vadrouille*', *France Nouvelle*, n° 1109, 18 January 1967, p. 27.

⁴³ 'A propos du film *La Grande Vadrouille*', *France Nouvelle*, n° 1110, 25 January 1967, p. 27.

⁴⁴ See also *Le Monde*, 26 January 1967: 'When *France Nouvelle* criticises its critic'.

⁴⁵ 'A propos de la rubrique cinématographique', *France Nouvelle*, n° 1111, 1 February 1967, p. 27.

Congress. We want to reassure them immediately on this point'. The readers' reaction to the bad reviews of *La Grande Vadrouille* was not an exceptional one. Regularly *L'Humanité* and *L'Humanité Dimanche* published readers' letters where they expressed their dissatisfaction at the way some of the journal's critics seem to forget the audience. At the beginning of May '68, a reader sent a letter to *L'Humanité Dimanche*, in which she regrets that the review of François Truffaut's *La Mariée était en noir* by *L'Humanité Dimanche*'s film critic proved that his judgement may err at times. She adds that for her, 'French people do not recognise themselves in French films', citing Godard as a prime example, because she does not understand everything in *Weekend*, which she finds too formalist, too much art for art's sake, although she admits that Godard concerns himself with French society.⁴⁶ Again one might wonder here who decides on which letter is published and which is not. As far as the editors of the different Communist publications are concerned, the readers' letters may have been used as a warning for their journalists not to go too far.

It is worth comparing Cervoni's difficulties at establishing his own space in *France Nouvelle* with the independence of mind Sadoul continued to enjoy in *Les Lettres françaises*. While Cervoni was read the riot act for his 'maverick' putting down of Oury's comedy in *France Nouvelle*, the same month Sadoul praised very highly Luc Moullet's *Brigitte et Brigitte* in *Les Lettres françaises*.⁴⁷ Moullet was a regular contributor to *Cahiers du cinéma* who always made clear his views on the film industry. In this low budget film, one of the characters, who wants to make films, has no intention of going to a film school, criticises the use of professional cards and professional actors, as well as gently poking fun at Sadoul himself. It is quite apparent from both Cervoni's rejection of a highly successful mainstream French film and Sadoul's praise of a typically marginal film-maker that the two critics are adopting a different viewpoint from Communist personnel working in the film industry or from other film critics for whom this aspect of the film trade matters. When Oury's big-budget production *Le Cerveau* was released in March 1969, Lachize's review overtly took into account the industrial aspect of the film: 'French cinema needs films

⁴⁶ 'La Mariée était en noir mérite-t-elle des fleurs?', *L'Humanité Dimanche*, n° 166, 5 May 1968.

⁴⁷ Georges Sadoul, 'Comme l'as de pique', *Les Lettres françaises*, n° 1161, 15 December 1966.

like *Le Cerveau*: firstly because it is a good film which successfully aims at entertaining its audiences without vulgarity and cheap tricks, the second reason has to do with the present conditions of production. The appalling level of unemployment in the film trade calls for far-reaching measures for improving these conditions. The film trade cannot be satisfied with improvised craftsmanship even if this craftsmanship is closer to art than to heavy industrial machinery.’⁴⁸ Seven years after the New Wave’s loss of appeal, the same argumentation continues to be used by some critics; Sadoul, Cervoni, Capdenac or Lachize, although all working in Communist outlets cannot hide their differences of opinion.

Such divergence may be explained if one takes into account the different status of the various Communist publications in question and their various readerships. At the beginning of her study of the revamped Communist monthly *La Nouvelle Critique*, Frédérique Matonti classifies the various journals which make up the Party’s press. She distinguishes three categories: a first group aims at the core of the Communist electorate, the grassroots: *L’Humanité*, *Les Cahiers du Communisme*, *France-Nouvelle*; a second one aims at specific categories of readers: *La Pensée* (third level education), *Europe* (second level education), *Les Lettres françaises* and *La Nouvelle Critique* (well-read readership) and a last one is concerned with publications related to satellite organisations: *Heures Claires*, *Vaillant le journal de Pif*, *Clarté*...⁴⁹ In the case studied above, it is interesting to note that *Les Lettres françaises*, edited by Aragon, does not appear obliged to stick so closely to the Party’s political line. As a cultural weekly, *Les Lettres françaises* targeted an intellectual middle-class readership and therefore may be seen as being more open to new ideas or currents. *France Nouvelle* is more directly the Party’s political outlet — it was after all the Central Committee’s periodical — and as such, probably kept a shorter leash on its collaborators.

The debate around *La Grande Vadrouille* thus underlined a split between Communist critics. There were those who stuck to the defence of a national cinema and for whom box-

⁴⁸ *L’Humanité*, 8 March 1969.

⁴⁹ Frédérique Matonti, *La double illusion: La Nouvelle Critique: une revue du PCF (1967-1980)*. Thèse de doctorat en science politique (Université de Paris-I—Panthéon Sorbonne—École doctorale de science politique de la Sorbonne, 1996), p. 66.

office successes were clear signs of its ability to equal or even surpass Hollywood productions. The formal conservatism and debatable ideological content of these mainstream films seemed to matter little against their popular appeal and economic achievements. Moreover, as the reviews of successful comedies have shown, there was also a deliberate — and political — will — or need — to stay in touch with the larger part of the Party's grassroots. But there were also an increasing number of French Communist critics for whom the fact that a national production met with commercial success was not necessarily a guarantee of its merits, and whose interest in avant-garde or innovative film form was paramount. These critics were growing frustrated and were anxious to be able to fulfil their more demanding ambitions. The turning point of May '68 would give them the opportunity, in outlets which allowed them operate on two levels, *en amont* (editorial policy) as *en aval* (readership).

6.2. May '68: the Opening Up

In October 1971, Cervoni, asking whether political cinema was becoming a reality, underlines that, on the one hand, there has been an increase in theoretical work dealing with the relation between politics, ideology, and film since 1968 and, on the other, that there has been an increase in the number of films which deal at one level or another with politics and/or political issues.⁵⁰ Cervoni classifies these films in two categories. The first one is the 'information films', by which he means militant cinema as produced notably by film collectives such as Dynadia or Slon; the second one concerns narrative films. This latter group is itself divided in three sub-groups: the first one is made up of films which are described as 'spectacular', such as *Z* or *L'Aveu*, the second one concerns films which support a far left ideology, such as Karmitz's *Camarades* or Godard's *Luttes en Italie* and the last one includes films which are closer to the PCF's persuasion, such as Pascal Aubier's *Valparaiso, Valparaiso*. Cervoni's classification sums up what effectively took place in the

⁵⁰ Cervoni, 'Le cinéma politique devient-il possible ?', *France Nouvelle*, n°1350, 28-4 October 1971, pp. 27-28.

aftermath of May '68. The emergence of political cinema in France happened alongside a wider debate among Marxist film specialists as to the ideological dimension of film and the possibility of a truly Marxist cinema. As would invariably be the case after May '68, views and opinions were often expressed in relation to the PCF's own viewpoint. In her analysis entitled *May 68 and Film Culture* Sylvia Harvey rightly points to 'the extraordinary diversity of positions on the Left (from Stalinist to anarchist across to the middle ground of popular front socialism)' during and after the May events and underlines 'the central importance of the French Communist Party'. As she puts it, 'despite the bitter hostility expressed by some sections of the French Left towards the PCF, it remained a kind of touchstone in relation to which other analyses, other positions, were expressed and defined'.⁵¹

Between 1968 and over most of the following decade, the Communist press would offer a wider variety of views and perspectives than ever before. While *L'Humanité*, *L'Humanité Dimanche*, *France Nouvelle* and *Les Lettres françaises* continued their policy of looking at all types of film, from mainstream to avant-garde, *La Nouvelle Critique* went much further in the direction of theory and textual analysis. This departure was the consequence of the wider debate among French Marxists characteristic of the post-May '68 period and which had taken off mainly thanks to the publication of Althusser's analyses. I will examine now how, of all Communist outlets, *La Nouvelle Critique* was the one most in touch with the theoretical dimension of the age.

⁵¹ Sylvia Harvey, *May '68 and Film Culture* (London: BFI, 1980), p. 13.

6.2.1. The Particular Position of *La Nouvelle Critique*

The following analysis owes much to the already mentioned research on *La Nouvelle Critique* by Frédérique Matonti. Unlike other studies dealing with the issue of the relationship between intellectuals and the PCF, Frédérique Matonti's thorough and enlightening examination of the revamped *Nouvelle Critique*, launched in April 1967, does not exclude cinema. Indeed the importance Matonti gives to film in her study bears testimony to the unique relationship, within the French Communist press, between film and *La Nouvelle Critique*.⁵²

For a number of years, the film pages of the revamped PCF's monthly *La Nouvelle Critique* would show an interesting departure from what the Party press readers had grown accustomed to. As I have shown above, if French Communist criticism had done away with the ideologically simplistic positions of the 1950s and, since Argenteuil, had acknowledged the artist's personal independence, film critics were still looking for a more rigorous criterion which would limit the excesses of subjective impressionistic critique. *La Nouvelle Critique* would constitute precisely the forum where critics would be able follow their avant-garde inclinations within a theoretical framework. Before this could take place, *La Nouvelle Critique* had to find its own space. Matonti explains that it took a few months before the journal was able to find its niche within the scope of Communist journals and magazines. For many years *Les Lettres françaises* had opened up their pages to non-Communists, in keeping with the spirit of Argenteuil.⁵³ In competition with Aragon's weekly, *La Nouvelle Critique* decided to go deliberately avant-garde and 'push further towards theory', which, in French Communist terms, spelt Althusser rather than Garaudy.⁵⁴ *Les Lettres françaises* were considered more inclined towards Garaudy's wide-reaching humanist Marxism. At a time when theory was coming to the fore, Althusser's scientific brand of Marxism was

⁵² Matonti, pp. 349-392.

⁵³ 'Closer to the literary or film avant-gardes and to the theoreticians of structuralism, *Les Lettres françaises* were ahead of *La Nouvelle Critique* in terms of opening up to outside non-Communist work', Matonti, p. 70.

⁵⁴ Matonti, pp. 351-352.

attractive to *La Nouvelle Critique* and allowed it to find its own distinctive position. Althusser published there what he was unable to publish in *La Pensée*. So *La Nouvelle Critique* printed what was considered at the vanguard of research done on the Communist movement.⁵⁵

This move towards the avant-garde was first illustrated by the rapprochement in 1967 between *Tel Quel* and *La Nouvelle Critique* in terms of literary criticism, followed by the rapprochement with *Cahiers du cinéma*, which would constitute what Matonti calls ‘the second experiment with the avant-garde’.⁵⁶ The links between *La Nouvelle Critique* and *Tel Quel* were borne out of ‘an appetite for theory after years of constraints and the desire to compete with the ‘*réalisme sans rivages*’ of the Aragon-Garaudy-*Les Lettres françaises* pole.’⁵⁷ Yet, because *Tel Quel* derived much of its methodology from structuralism, the coming together of the two magazines, illustrated by the article ‘*Tel Quel* nous répond’ of 1967, constituted a real transgression, all the more so since many in *La Nouvelle Critique* used methods of analysis and references which were familiar to the readers of *Tel Quel*.⁵⁸ The fact that *Tel Quel* was seen to back the PCF in May ’68 may explain why *La Nouvelle Critique* was allowed such leeway.⁵⁹ In May ’68 *Tel Quel* rejected *gauchiste* ‘spontaneism’.⁶⁰ In his history of *Tel Quel*, Patrick Ffrench explains that ‘the ideology of imagination and spontaneity is criticised as a voluntarist idealism or *rousseauisme* which masks the true role of the Party, the Leninist dictum of the necessity of the Party and Marxist science, and the Althusserian postulate of the autonomy of theory and its guiding role.’⁶¹ *Tel Quel*’s prominent and influential position in the late 1960s also appealed to *Cahiers du cinéma*.

⁵⁵ Ibid., p. 68.

⁵⁶ Ibid., p. 68.

⁵⁷ Ibid., p. 332.

⁵⁸ ‘*Tel Quel* nous répond’, *La Nouvelle Critique*, n° 8-9, November-December 1967, pp. 50-54.

⁵⁹ ‘Two hundred and sixty intellectuals: “We will vote for the candidates of the PCF”’, among the signatories are Julia Kristeva, Marcelin Pleyne and Philippe Sollers, in *L’Humanité*, 13 June 1968.

⁶⁰ See Philippe Sollers, ‘Contestation ou révolution’, *La Nouvelle Critique*, n° 15, June 1968, p. 20. See also Claude Preust, ‘Les bases de l’idéologie gauchiste’, *ibid.*, pp. 9-13.

⁶¹ Patrick Ffrench, *The Time of Theory* (London: Clarendon Press, 1995), p. 116.

6.2.2. The Rapprochement between *La Nouvelle Critique* and *Cahiers du cinéma*

Initially changes were slow and a certain amount of resistance was experienced. The first months of the new formula of *La Nouvelle Critique*'s critical position were marked by the traditional emphasis on content and simply an aspiration to go beyond what Matonti calls the 'film-reflection/film-mirror'.⁶² Yet this was enough to trigger a reaction from the PCF's traditional quarters. Thus Daquin accused *La Nouvelle Critique* of narcissism, and its writers of 'taking their daily LSD tablets' instead of concentrating on the 'sociological signification' of films.⁶³ An article comparing Resnais and Godard or a paper on film and politics devoted to Godard's *La Chinoise* and Bernardo Bertolucci's *La Chine est proche*, never materialised.⁶⁴ Nevertheless the irresistible aspiration to a new approach came out of the critics' weariness with traditional Communist criticism. This is how Émile Breton explains the critical positioning of *La Nouvelle Critique*: 'What you found in *L'Humanité* was a type of humanist criticism, a criticism based on good impulses. [...] We wanted to go beyond the Party's old cliché on form and content so that for us form became everything, became content. In *L'Huma*, a film was good when it was good for the workers. Perhaps we pushed too far the other way.'⁶⁵ Just as the alliance between *La Nouvelle Critique* and *Tel Quel* suited both parties, if only for a short while, the rapprochement between the Communist review and *Cahiers du cinéma* came out of a mutual understanding that both journals would benefit from this collaboration. On the one hand the Communist review was looking outward, on the other, given the political zeitgeist, film journals were keen on furthering their political involvement or defining what they should stand for. This was already happening before May '68 when some film journals were moving towards structuralism and semiotics, which coincided with a move towards Marxist politics.⁶⁶ This trend could only gain

⁶² Matonti, p. 377.

⁶³ *La Nouvelle Critique*, n° 5, June 1967, p. 67, in Matonti., p. 353. Matonti mentions that Daquin was given the nickname 'the man we love the most' by the younger members of the film cell and *La Nouvelle Critique*, an allusion to the 1950 film made by a group of Communist film directors and technicians which celebrated Stalin's glory.

⁶⁴ Matonti, pp. 356-371.

⁶⁵ Matonti, p. 367.

⁶⁶ Matonti, pp. 349-350.

momentum after the events. Only in the aftermath of May '68 did *La Nouvelle Critique* put forward a true theoretical discourse about cinema. The new critical position adopted by *La Nouvelle Critique* was in sharp contrast with the type of criticism practised in other Communist outlets. Looking at films in a new light, which emphasised the filmic text, in keeping with *Tel Quel*'s own text-based approach, the journal differed from traditional Communist reviews and their emphasis on content over form. This could only happen with the arrival of new blood, in particular the arrival of ex-*Cahiers* writers who 'will put the Communist magazine on a new track'.⁶⁷ Two men played a central role in this evolution: Jean-Patrick Lebel and Jean-André Fieschi, joined by Bernard Eisenschitz after he was expelled from *Cahiers*. Lebel was a film director, Fieschi wrote in the *Cahiers*. Both joined the PCF in 1968, Lebel before May, Fieschi after. Lebel participated in *Contre-champs* with Jean-Pierre Léonardini, Émile Breton, Albert Cervoni, Bernard Stora and Gérard Guégan. For Lebel, *Contre-champs* was a kind of 'leftist *Cahiers du Cinéma*'.⁶⁸ Fieschi, unlike *Cahiers*, was impressed by Lebel's and Stora's attitude during the Estates General of French Cinema in May '68, and moved towards the PCF to which Lebel and Stora belonged. Fieschi left the *Cahiers*, because he disagreed with the position adopted by Jean-Louis Comolli and Jean Narboni, who, for him, practised the policy of tabula rasa ('they burnt films they had loved before, and forsaking the director's role, wanted to give the cameras to the workers'). In addition, the ex-*Cahiers* received the support of Breton who joined *La Nouvelle Critique* in May '71 and shared with them their refusal of 'content criticism'.⁶⁹

For their own part, *Cahiers du cinéma* showed a willingness to become more in touch with politics. Antoine de Baecque explains how in the aftermath of May '68, *Cahiers*'s writers were willing to become more fully politically involved. They had been disappointed by the utopian dimension of the Estates General of Cinema and the lack of real commitment of many of those who participated in the meetings and discussions. For *Cahiers du cinéma*, only the PCF could offer experience and efficiency, both in the intellectual domain and in

⁶⁷ Matonti, p. 362.

⁶⁸ Ibid., p. 363.

⁶⁹ Matonti, p. 366.

active militancy.⁷⁰ Between Spring 1969, marked by Jacques Duclos's presidential campaign as the Communist candidate, and autumn 1970, there existed close links between *Cahiers* and *La Nouvelle Critique*. For a while, *Cahiers du cinéma* were actually printed by the PPI, a printing company which belonged to the PCF.⁷¹

In February 1969, two articles signed by Fieschi, Stora and Joseph Venturini put an end to the critical uncertainties of the previous years. Venturini proposed to exclude the *hors-texte* to discuss only the filmic text. Matonti presents as new the fact that *La Nouvelle Critique* defended some film-makers independently of the latter's personal ideological affinities: 'In parallel with *La Nouvelle Critique*, the collaborators who came from *Cahiers* remained faithful to their choice and thus broke away from the old critical convention based on the directors' ideological and political positions. Eisenschitz praised Robert Kramer who could be considered a '*gauchiste*', Samuel Fuller, a 'fascist', Jerry Lewis or Bernardo Bertolucci, two *Cahiers* favourites.⁷² As I have shown in chapter 4, this had happened before in the history of the PCF's film criticism. Without going back to Sadoul's unwavering support of Robert Bresson throughout the 1950s when Zhdanovism was rampant, the reception of the New Wave or Sadoul's appreciation of Moullet's *Brigitte et Brigitte* had already shown openness on the part of Communist critics. It seems that at times Frédérique Matonti overemphasises the novelty and boldness of *La Nouvelle Critique*'s viewpoint. Yet she is absolutely right when she states that the originality of *La Nouvelle Critique* within the French Communist press rests on its theoretical rigour. For instance she points out that Fieschi defended Tati when Cervoni's review of *Playtime* described the director as reactionary.⁷³ Lachize liked the film too, but out of the three critics Fieschi is the only one who bases his review on a textual approach to the film itself.⁷⁴ Emblematic of the avant-garde direction of *La Nouvelle Critique*, the journal's admiration of Jean-Marie Straub and

⁷⁰ Baecque, p. 238.

⁷¹ Ibid., p. 239.

⁷² Matonti, p. 369. Bernard Eisenschitz: *Ice*, n° 38, October 1970, pp. 96-97; *Park Row*, n° 44, May 71, pp. 68-69; *Ya ya mon général*, n° 40, January 71, 72-73; *Le Conformiste*, n° 44, May 71, pp 68-69.

⁷³ Cervoni, 'L'air du temps', *France Nouvelle*, 27 December 1967, p. 14; Matonti, p. 369.

⁷⁴ Lachize, 'Monsieur Hulot, c'est notre Gulliver...', *L'Humanité*, 20 December 1967.

Danièle Huillet was evidenced by the number of pages devoted to their film *Othon*.⁷⁵ At the same time *Cahiers* rediscovered Soviet cinema through a series of articles by Eisenschitz on the Russian avant-garde of the 1920s.⁷⁶ Given the divisions of the Left and far left after the failure of May '68, with the ensuing ostracism which befell on the PCF, it comes as no surprise that the *Cahiers/Nouvelle Critique* joint venture was criticised by film journals which were critical of the PCF. *Positif*, *Jeune Cinéma*, *Image et Son* among others, wondered whether the 'once yellow *Cahiers* had not become red' and went even as far as accusing *Cahiers*'s writers of cutting out of their papers any negative reference to the PCF.⁷⁷ The contradictory analyses of Jean Renoir's *La Vie est à nous* constitute a telling illustration of the film journals' ideological conflict. In 1936, the PCF asked Renoir to direct a propaganda film entitled *La Vie est à nous* destined to be used as a propaganda tool during the electoral campaign for the 1936 general elections. For *Positif*, *La Vie est à nous* is a typically 'frontist' film in which Duclos's speech anticipates his own 1969 presidential campaign. The film exemplifies the absence of revolutionary spirit in the PCF as well as its bourgeois reformism.⁷⁸ On the contrary, for *La Nouvelle Critique* and *Cahiers du cinéma*, the film is the object of a long collective debate presenting and defending Renoir's film as the epitome of the perfect propaganda film and should be used as an example of what could be achieved.⁷⁹ The search for political efficiency on *Cahiers*'s part which de Baecque underlines was visible here. In front of these attacks, some readers wrote to *Cahiers*, asking them to clarify their position regarding the PCF's cultural policy, as did Dominique Païni, then a member of the PCF, nowadays director of the French Cinémathèque. The answer remained quite elusive and rather abstract: 'the points raised in this letter are important and call for an answer which would exceed the limit of this column The central question today for

⁷⁵ Aimé Guedj, Jean-André Fieschi, Richard Demarcy, Jean Narboni and Maurice Goldring, 'Débat sur *Othon*', *La Nouvelle Critique*, n° 43, April 1971, pp. 58-67; see Matonti, p. 370.

⁷⁶ The *Cahiers du cinéma* published two special issues: one on 'Russie années vingt', May-June 1970, the other on 'S.M. Eisenstein', January-February 1971.

⁷⁷ A point which is still discussed according to Baecque, p. 240.

⁷⁸ Goffredo Fofi, 'La Vie est à nous', *Positif*, n° 113, February 1970, pp. 43-47.

⁷⁹ *Cahiers du cinéma*, n° 218, March 1970, pp. 44-51. *La Vie est à nous* made the cover of *Cahiers du cinéma*, n° 217, November 1969.

any theoretical avant-garde based on dialectical materialism is the articulation of its specific work; those who read us cannot not see that.'⁸⁰ The lack of clarity in *Cahiers*'s reply revealed their uneasiness when actually pushed to define how close they were to the PCF. A much clearer answer would soon be given.

6.2.3. The Split of Autumn 1971

The coming together of *Tel Quel*, *La Nouvelle Critique* and *Cahiers du cinéma* was never and could never be a stable marriage. From the word go, there existed divergence and disagreement among them as to their political and ideological positions. Given the increasing influence of Maoism in France at the time, the likelihood of seeing the divergence of opinions widening was always high and soon became fact. *Tel Quel*, and *Cahiers du cinéma* in their wake, were drawn towards Maoism. This attraction could only make the fragile entente between them and *La Nouvelle Critique* more precarious and the split proved unavoidable. The two non-Communist journals became more and more critical of the PCF and the latter could no longer tolerate their Chinese drift. Both Patrick Ffrench and Philippe Forest have analysed *Tel Quel*'s Maoism, and de Baecque has described *Cahiers*'s far left period.⁸¹ The split which concerns us here more specifically between *La Nouvelle Critique* and *Cahiers* happened at two levels: political and theoretical. On a political level, *Cahiers du cinéma* made clear their disagreement with the PCF's political programme and, by doing so, joined other far left groups in their criticism of the so-called reformism and revisionism of the PCF. The political contention also informed the theoretical one, but there the conflict was more fruitful insofar as a debate took place between *La Nouvelle Critique*, *Cahiers* and *Cinéthique*, a third Marxist film journal which claimed to follow the principles of dialectical materialism and which had close connections with *Tel Quel*. I shall be looking firstly at the consequences of political dissension between the various French branches of Marxism. Then I shall turn my attention to the theoretical debate which accompanied this political parting.

⁸⁰ Baecque, p. 240.

⁸¹ See Forest, pp. 322-419; Ffrench, pp. 105-125; and Baecque, pp. 248-263.

From this it will be possible to look at the Communist stance on three post May '68 aspects of French cinema: the political thriller, militant cinema and, last but not least, the PCF's view on Jean-Luc Godard, the essential figure of the period (or of any contemporary period of French film for that matter).

6.3. The P'C'F versus '*les Gauchistes*': the Battle of the Inverted Commies

In the aftermath of May '68 and for the next ten years or so, a considerable amount of writing was devoted to the ideological and political dimension of cinema. This took place within the wider framework of French Marxism, with the PCF as the butt of most criticism. Within two years the former partners of *La Nouvelle Critique* turned to Maoism and started concentrating their attacks almost exclusively on the PCF. From the end of 1971 onwards and for many subsequent years, whether in *Cahiers* or in *Cinéthique*, there would not be a single issue without a denunciation of the PCF and its policy. How violent these attacks turned out to be is a subject of amazement today and bears testimony to the lasting consequences of May '68. It is actually difficult to see how *Cahiers*'s and *La Nouvelle Critique*'s collaborators were ever able to work together. In December 1971, Jean Narboni's article made clear that the links between *La Nouvelle Critique* and *Cahiers du cinéma* had been irremediably severed.⁸² Before he attacks the PCF's revisionism, Narboni justifies the rapprochement that had taken place. On the *Cahiers*'s part, it was a reaction to the anticommunism which dominated film criticism, outside as well as, in the past, inside *Cahiers* themselves. The PCF seemed then after the collapse of the May '68 movement, the only political force which possessed a coherent strategy to oppose the bourgeoisie.⁸³ Moreover, while the *gauchiste* movements were spontaneist, and therefore markedly anti-theory, *La Nouvelle Critique*'s interest in avant-garde and theory appealed to *Cahiers*. Narboni also mentions that he was attracted by the interest shown by some Communist

⁸² Baecque mentions a letter sent by *Cahiers* to in June 71, in which the film journal made clear their reservation about the PCF's cultural policy: 'Réponse à *Politique-Hebdo*', pp. 61-64; see also Matonti, pp. 380-381.

⁸³ Jean Narboni, 'Politique et lutte idéologique de classes, intervention 1', *Cahiers du cinéma*, n° 234-235, pp. December 1971-January-February 1972, pp. 5-14.

intellectuals for the avant-garde: 'An insufficient and erroneous analysis led us to believe that, in spite of a fundamental disagreement with the PCF's cultural policy (eclectic, liberal, right-wing) and our reservations — which never appeared in the journal — towards some of its political positions, some of the Party's progressive elements could become dominant through internal struggle.'⁸⁴ But the PCF did not change in the direction *Cahiers* was hoping for. The rest of Narboni's article, as well as the second part, is a lengthy denunciation of the PCF's politics, including its revisionism, its economism and its abandonment of the principles of Marxism-Leninism.⁸⁵ Very soon, *Cahiers* would start branding the PCF with the shameful mark: when referring to the Party in the journal, the C for *Communist* would be adorned with inverted commas: P'C'F.⁸⁶ For a number of years, this was the mark of the far left's distrust of the PCF and a way to show the alleged Party's betrayal of its revolutionary Communist *raison d'être*. Similarly, in the French Communist press, when reference was made to far left groups, the word *gauchiste* would almost always be used and most of the time, it would also be embellished with inverted commas: 'gauchistes'.⁸⁷ For instance, *La Nouvelle Critique* responded to an article published in *Positif*, which had a long history of being anti-PCF, where the form P'C'F was used, by pointing to 'the infantile anti-Communism of these 'gauchistes', be they naive or sincere, manipulated or manipulators who write P'C'F for PCF in a kind of religious exorcism thought to be enough to question the Communist identity of the Party'.⁸⁸ Breton also responded to *Cahiers* by stressing their anticommunism and their dogmatism.⁸⁹ More pointedly, Breton considered that *Cahiers*'s argumentation was based on an erroneous, dogmatic, reading of Althusser's Ideological State

⁸⁴ Baecque, p. 244.

⁸⁵ Jean Narboni, 'Politique et lutte idéologique de classes, intervention 2', *Cahiers du cinéma*, n° 236-237, March-April 1972, pp. 82-85.

⁸⁶ 'De quelques événements récents', *Cahiers du cinéma*, n° 236-237, March-April 1972, pp. 90-92.

⁸⁷ For a Communist analysis of *gauchisme*, see Jacques Siquier, 'En marge d'une émission de télévision sur le gauchisme', *La Nouvelle Critique*, n° 56, September 1972, pp. 85-86.

⁸⁸ 'Une semaine positive', *France Nouvelle*, n° 1316, 27 January 1971, p. 27. See chapter 4, pp. 156-60.

⁸⁹ Émile Breton, 'La NC a vu', *La Nouvelle Critique*, n° 53, May 1972, pp. 91-92. It is worth pointing out that, in spite of the numerous anti-PCF attacks present in *Cahiers*, Breton recommends two articles, one on Bresson, one on Bazin, a fair-play gesture impossible in 'the other camp'. *Cahiers*'s dogmatism adopted a Cultural Revolution style: Baecque recounts that Bernard Eisenschitz, the only member of the editorial committee who was also a member of the PCF was subjected to a 'political trial' by the rest of *Cahiers*'s collaborators, Baecque, p. 251.

Apparatuses work hypothesis. This remark highlights an important aspect of the May '68 period: political discord coincided with theoretical contention.

6.3.1. Theory: the Marxist Debate

Revolution and theory were very much at the heart of the debate which was taking place among the different film journals. *The* question was how to make a film which would be in agreement with the principles of dialectical materialism. What was a materialist film? Had films been made, or could films be made along these principles? Was it possible within the existing structures of production and distribution? Shouldn't dialectical materialism be implemented in society first? Harvey studies the theoretical and critical work which May '68 triggered in the realm of French film in great detail but she only discusses the texts published by *Cahiers du cinéma* and *Cinéthique*, without once mentioning *La Nouvelle Critique*. Yet as shall be seen now the theoretical discussions on dialectical materialism and film as they appeared in the two aforementioned film journals were mostly responses to, and attacks on, Lebel's positions. Published first as a series of articles in *La Nouvelle Critique* and subsequently collected in his book *Cinéma et Idéologie*, where he himself responded to and criticised *Cahiers's* and *Cinéthique's* views.⁹⁰ In *Cahiers*, Narboni and Comolli wrote a series of articles in which they defined the magazine's theoretical positions.⁹¹ In *Cinéthique*, Gérard Leblanc and Jean-Paul Fargier were the prime exponents of the journal's views on the matter.⁹² Harvey's overlooking of Lebel means that an important aspect of the debate has been left out of her discussion. If one compares the dates of publication of the different papers, one finds it difficult to say exactly if one journal was answering the other and, if it

⁹⁰ Jean-Patrick Lebel, 'Cinéma et idéologie: invention 'idéologique' ou découverte scientifique', *La Nouvelle Critique*, n° 34, May 1970, pp. 66-73; 'Les formes cinématographiques sont-elles idéologiques en elles-mêmes?', *ibid.*, n° 35, June 1970, pp. 60-67; 'Sur *Cinéma et Idéologie*, débat avec les lecteurs', *ibid.*, n° 37, October 1970, pp. 58-64, *Cinéma et idéologie* (Paris: Éditions sociales, 1971).

⁹¹ Jean-Louis Comolli, 'Le détour par le direct', *Cahiers du Cinéma*, n° 209, February 1969, pp. 48-53 & n° 211, April 1969, pp. 40-45; Jean-Louis Comolli and Jean Narboni, 'Cinéma/idéologie/critique', *Cahiers du Cinéma*, n° 216, October 1969, pp. 11-15, and 'Cinéma/idéologie/critique 2', *ibid.*, n° 217, November 1969, pp. 7-13.

⁹² Gérard Leblanc, 'Direction', *Cinéthique*, n° 5, September-October 1969, pp. 1-8; Jean-Paul Fargier, 'La parenthèse et le détour', *Cinéthique*, n° 5, September-October 1969, pp. 15-21.

were the case, in what order. What is certain is that, on the one hand, Lebel's views were attacked, sometimes violently, by the two others journals, and, on the other, that Lebel's *Cinéma et idéologie* was his response to these attacks.

As the political split grew wider and wider, the theoretical writings bore signs of this by criticising more and more overtly the other's positions.⁹³ Nevertheless, the declaration read out by *Cahiers*' critics at the 6th Mostra Internazionale Cinema Libero, on 9 October 1971 in Porretta Terme, made public the division among the different French film journals, as it aggressively criticised *Positif*, *Cinéma 71* and *La Nouvelle Critique*.⁹⁴ As this analysis is concerned primarily with the PCF's position, let us look first at the position held by its opponents and next at how Lebel's responded to them. In spite of their almost continuous quarrelling, *Cahiers du cinéma* and *Cinéthique* shared the similar view that the 'filmic apparatus' was in itself quintessentially ideological.⁹⁵ For *Cinéthique*, this reflection was triggered by *Tel Quel*'s Marcelin Pleynet who explained that the camera was not neutral, but instead, as an invention of dominant ideology, diffused bourgeois ideology.⁹⁶ In addition to the ideological character of the film apparatus, *Cinéthique* also denounced the 'impression of reality'. Both Leblanc and Fargier point the finger at the ideological essence and effect of this particular phenomenon. In 'Parenthesis or Indirect Route', Fargier draws on Althusser's definition of ideology — an ideology is a system (possessing its own logic and rigour) of representation (images, myths, ideas or concepts, as the case may be) existing and having a historical role within a given society — to define the cinema's particular ideological

⁹³ See Pascal Bonitzer, 'Fétichisme de la technique: la notion de plan', *Cahiers du Cinéma*, n° 233; November 1971, pp. 4-10; Jean-Pierre Oudart, 'Note pour une théorie de la représentation', *ibid.*, n° 229; May 1971, pp. 43-45; Jean Narboni, 'Sur quelques contresens', *ibid.*, n° 226-227, January-February 1971, pp. 116-118.

⁹⁴ Pascal Bonitzer, Jean-Louis Comolli, Jean Narboni, 'Porretta Terme 2', *Cahiers du cinéma*, n° 233, November 1971, pp. 46-47.

⁹⁵ See Jean-Louis Comolli and Jean Narboni, 'Cinéma/idéologie/critique 2', *Cahiers du cinéma*, n° 217, November 1969, pp. 7-13; 'Du bon usage de la valeur d'échange', *Cinéthique*, n° 6, January-February 1970, pp. 1-12; Marcelin Pleynet, 'Le point aveugle', *ibid.*, n° 6, January-February 1970, pp. 13-20. For a thorough analysis of *Cinéthique* and *Cahiers*'s divergences, see Harvey, pp. 27-43 and pp. 87-119.

⁹⁶ Gérard Leblanc, 'Interview with Marcellin Pleynet and Jean Thibaudeau: "Économique-idéologique-formel"', *Cinéthique*, n° 3, 1969, pp. 7-14.

function.⁹⁷ For Fargier, this function is double. First, 'cinema REPRODUCES, it reflects existing ideologies. It is therefore used (consciously or unconsciously) as a vector in the process of circulating ideologies'. Secondly, cinema also 'PRODUCES its own ideology: THE IMPRESSION OF REALITY. There is nothing on the screen, only reflections and shadows, and yet the first idea that audience gets is that reality is there, as it really is'.⁹⁸ Consequently, the impression of reality must be shattered in order to avoid spectators' mystification and in order to develop a truly Marxist cinema:

A MATERIALIST film is one which does not give illusory reflections of reality. In fact it 'reflects' nothing. It starts from its own material nature (flat screen, natural ideological bias, audience) and that of the world and shows them both, all in one movement. This movement is a theoretical one. It provides scientific knowledge of the world and the cinema, and is the means whereby cinema fights its part of the battle against idealism. But in order to win it has to be dialectical as well, otherwise it is only a beautiful but useless piece of machinery, which carries on functioning in a void without ever being harnessed for the transformation of reality. A DIALECTICAL FILM is one made in the consciousness, which it is able to transmit to the audience, of the exact process whereby an item of knowledge or a depiction of reality is transformed by degrees into screen material to be then re-converted into knowledge and a view of reality in the audience's mind.⁹⁹

From this, *Cinéthique* adopted a very extreme position by which all types of films were rejected but the most extreme in experimental and avant-garde cinema, leaving *Cinéthique* with few films to defend.¹⁰⁰ Comolli and Narboni in *Cahiers du cinéma* also reacted positively to Pleynet's view and drew on Althusser's conceptions.¹⁰¹ *Cahiers*'s critics reject the idea of a neutral camera: 'Cinema is one of the languages through which the world communicates itself to itself. They constitute its ideology for they reproduce the world as it is

⁹⁷ Jean-Paul Fargier, 'La parenthèse et le détour', *Cinéthique*, n° 5, pp. 15-21, reproduced and translated by Susan Bennett as 'Parenthesis or indirect route', v 12 n° 2, *Screen Reader 1*, (London: The Society for Education in Film and Television, 1977), p. 28.

⁹⁸ Ibid.

⁹⁹ Fargier, 'La parenthèse et le détour', *Cinéthique*, n° 5, pp. 15-21, reproduced and translated by Susan Bennett as 'Parenthesis or indirect route', v 12 n° 2, *Screen Reader 1*, p. 35.

¹⁰⁰ See Francesco Casetti, *Les Théories du cinéma depuis 1945* (Paris: Nathan, 1999), pp. 209-213.

¹⁰¹ (As Althusser defines it, more precisely : 'Ideologies are perceived-accepted-suffered cultural objects, which work fundamentally on men by a process they do not understand. What men express in their ideologies is not their true relation to their conditions of existence, but how they react to their conditions of existence ; which presupposes a real relationship and an imaginary relationship.'). Comolli and Narboni, 'Cinéma/Ideologie/Critique', *Cahiers du cinéma*, October 1969, n° 216, pp. 11-15, reproduced and translated by Susan Bennett as 'Cinema/Ideology/Criticism', *Screen Reader 1*, pp. 4-5.

experienced when filtered through the ideology.’¹⁰² Therefore, ‘Once we realise that it is in the nature of the system to turn the cinema into an instrument of ideology, we can see that the film-maker’s first task is to show up the cinema’s so-called “depiction of reality”. If he can do so there is a chance that we will be able to disrupt or possibly even sever the connection between the cinema and its ideological function.’¹⁰³ The two critics draw up a classification of the different types in terms of their relationship to dominant ideology or their ability to counteract it. Harvey helpfully sums it up as follows:

- (a) films which are ‘imbued through and through with the dominant ideology in pure and unadulterated form’;
- (b) films which ‘attack their ideological assimilation on two fronts’; these both ‘deal with a directly political subject’, and are involved in the process of ‘breaking down the traditional way of depicting reality’;
- (c) films in which the content ‘is not explicitly political, but in some way becomes so through the criticism practised on it through its form’; certain experimental films are cited here which operate the principle of self-reflexivity, of reflecting back on, and making explicit, their own devices for producing meaning;
- (d) films which ‘have an explicitly political content ... but which do not effectively criticise the ideological system in which they are embedded because they unquestioningly adopt its language and its imagery’;
- (e) films which seem at first to be caught within the dominant ideology, but which reveal on closer inspection that: An internal criticism is taking place which cracks the film apart at the seams. If one reads the film obliquely, looking for symptoms, if one looks beyond its apparent formal coherence, one can see that it is riddled with cracks: it is splitting under an internal tension which is simply not there in an ideologically innocuous film. The ideology thus becomes subordinate to the text. It no longer has an independent existence: it is *presented* by the film. This is the case in many Hollywood films, for example, which, while being completely integrated in the system and the ideology, end up by partially dismantling the system from within. It is this *Cahiers* category (e) which has subsequently provided the most food for thought for those critics who are primarily interested in the analysis of popular, mainstream, commercial cinema (*Cahiers* cite the films of Ford, Dreyer and Rossellini as examples of this category).
- (f) films which make use of *cinéma-vérité* techniques, and which are based on actual political events, but which, like category (d), ‘do not challenge the cinema’s traditional, ideologically-conditioned method of ‘depiction’’;
- (g) films which make use of *cinéma-vérité* techniques and which are based on actual political events, but which also operate critically at the level of their form, which call into question the conventions of documentary film.¹⁰⁴

As Casetti rightly underlines, ‘this classification avoided *Cinéthique*’s dry dichotomy’ and saved films and authors which had been readily rejected by the latter more dogmatic

¹⁰² Ibid., p. 5.

¹⁰³ Ibid.

¹⁰⁴ Harvey, pp. 35-36.

approach.¹⁰⁵ Both film journals are interested in the new sorts of critical relationship which can be established between spectator and spectacle.¹⁰⁶ Thus Leblanc explains that materialist films such as Jean-Daniel Pollet's *Méditerranée* and Marcel Hanoun's *Octobre à Madrid*, two of the few films which found favours with *Cinéthique*, 'do not offer the audience any pseudo-satisfaction; instead they take the entirely new step of inviting them to stand on the same footing as the makers of the film and take a conscious part in the work that produced (and through them continues to produce) the images and sounds. In these films, images and sounds at last no longer deny the process by which they came to be imprinted on the film stock... This break is materialism.'¹⁰⁷ *Cinéthique* and *Cahiers du cinéma*'s theoretical positions were part and parcel of the wider debate among French Marxist organisations. The Porretta Terme declaration, in which *Cahiers* made official their moving away from the PCF in a very aggressive way, attacked 'the revisionist pseudo-theoretician Lebel, propelled onto the theoretical stage only to block the film journals where a real theoretical reflection takes place.'¹⁰⁸ Lebel had indeed responded to their theoretical articles in his book, whose first chapter, entitled 'Cinema: "ideological" invention or scientific discovery?', contains numerous quotations from Leblanc, Fargier and Comolli which Lebel painstakingly criticises and refutes. Lebel rejects the arguments put forward by *Cahiers du cinéma* and *Cinéthique*: 'Whether we consider (like *Cinéthique*) that the camera produces ideology or (like *Cahiers*) that it simply reflects a pre-existing ideology, the difference is minimal and in each case, it is a mechanistic conception of ideology which is put forward.'¹⁰⁹ Moreover, while Lebel finds the denunciation of the ideological character of film to be justified, he refuses to see this as 'a natural defect' of cinema, since this view would lead necessarily to an essentialist conception of cinema. In other words, these film journals reached an idealistic position instead of a materialist one: 'Aiming at reaching an anti-Bazinian position they remain prisoners of the

¹⁰⁵ Casetti, p. 214.

¹⁰⁶ Harvey, p. 62.

¹⁰⁷ Gérard Leblanc, 'Direction', *Cinéthique*, n° 5, Sept-October 1969, pp. 1-7, in *Screen Reader 1*, p. 16.

¹⁰⁸ Pascal Bonitzer, Jean-Louis Comolli and Jean Narboni, 'Porretta Terme 2', *Cahiers du cinéma*, n° 233, November 1971, pp. 46-47.

¹⁰⁹ Lebel, *Cinéma et idéologie*, p. 21.

latter's idealistic mode of thought.'¹¹⁰ For Lebel, the film apparatus is not ideological in itself, it is not born out of an ideology of representation but out of a scientific basis, it is a tool, and therefore neutral.¹¹¹ If cinema seems naturally to reflect the dominant ideology, it is because such a dominant ideology exists, and not because cinema is ideological by nature.¹¹² Finally, Lebel does not consider that the type of films which *Cinéthique* advocates (deconstructed films in which the process of film-making is foregrounded) escapes falling into the trap of fascination: 'to think that fascination can be done away with simply by a deconstructive form is a mistake. A spectator used to dominant ideology won't be able to see deconstruction as a meaningful process, but will simply become irritated and reject it, the others, those who can relate to it, will be fascinated by this deconstruction, and they can only be culturally-privileged spectators who won't fall victims of it.'¹¹³ Here, Lebel points to the elitist subtext of *Cinéthique*'s argument, which was also highlighted by Harvey.¹¹⁴ The aesthetics of 'deconstruction' is in fact an aesthetics of 'destruction' since the pseudo-materialist cinema it advocates is possible only by denying the cinema itself, Lebel concludes. While he denounces the 'normative aesthetics and essentialism' which result from *Cinéthique* and *Cahiers*'s dogmatic views on deconstruction, direct cinema, montage or mise en scène, Lebel nevertheless recognises that it is nevertheless true that meaning (or ideological effect) manifests itself through form or forms.¹¹⁵ Indeed in his chapter of filmic language, Lebel draws extensively on Christian Metz's work, which finds favour with the Communist writer because Metz's approach is akin to a 'scientific' one.¹¹⁶ In addition, Lebel defends the concept of the auteur, a bourgeois concept to be rejected at all cost according to

¹¹⁰ Ibid., p. 21.

¹¹¹ Ibid., p. 26.

¹¹² Ibid., p. 27.

¹¹³ Lebel, *Cinéma et idéologie*, p. 39.

¹¹⁴ Discussing *Cinéthique*'s dogma, she writes: '...there is a disturbingly moralistic tone to the piece — We denounce cinema as a luxury and consumer product or as a cultural gimmick for the enslavement of a public ('Editorial-en-forme-de-manifeste', *Cinéthique*, n° 1, January 1969, p. 3) — which seems to be, as it were, demanding temperance rather than asking why people get drunk. There is a tone of indignation at the moral impurity of the masses who succumb to, who allow themselves to be hoodwinked by, the grosser fantasies purveyed by the commercial cinema, Harvey, p. 37.

¹¹⁵ Lebel, *Cinéma et idéologie*, p. 59.

¹¹⁶ Ibid., pp. 108-159.

his interlocutors.¹¹⁷ The main reproach Lebel addresses to his interlocutors is the fact that they forget the concrete social basis of cinema, its social function. Their extreme point of view renders any efficient ideological action impossible.¹¹⁸ Lebel's point is that one cannot speak of a 'materialist cinema' but instead of a 'materialist practice of cinema'. For him, a materialist practice of cinema is one which takes into account the concrete social basis of cinema. In terms of ideology, 'the ideological "aim" (*visée idéologique*) of a film depends on its concrete ideological impact on its audience and this impact itself depends on the ideological configuration of this public. The ideological impact of a film depends on the ideological conditioning of the public and the ideological and aesthetical gap between the film and the form which led to this conditioning. In other words, a revolutionary 'deconstructed film' will have little impact on a public accustomed to mainstream cinema. What a director needs to do is take into account the conditioning of his or her audience and find a way to play with, intervene and counteract this conditioning without alienating the audience (*l'engrenage idéologique sur le public*).¹¹⁹ Indeed, a talented director will be able to 'dominate ideological conditioning and give birth to a film whose meaning and aesthetico-ideological impact will be, for the most part, if not fully, his.'¹²⁰ This is in essence what Lebel advocates as a 'materialist practice of cinema'. As the above exposition demonstrates, Lebel's positions were miles apart from *Cahiers's* and *Cinéthique's*. Undoubtedly, Lebel tries to offset the Maoist drift present in the two other magazines' understanding of materialist cinema. His defence of the validity of the concept of auteur can also be seen as response to the influence of structuralism on theory.¹²¹ The main divergence, however, concerns the possibility to act on the existing system in order to convey a radical ideological message, a possibility which was entirely denied by *Cinéthique* and by *Cahiers* as well, whose stance became more and more extreme as it moved further to the far left.

¹¹⁷ See the rejection of the SRF as a bourgeois institution in *Cinéthique*, n° 13, 2nd quarter 1972, p. 10.

¹¹⁸ Lebel, *Cinéma et idéologie*, p. 42.

¹¹⁹ Ibid., p. 85.

¹²⁰ Ibid., p. 93.

¹²¹ Matonti, p. 379. See also Kristin Ross's pages on structuralist Marxism or Althusserianism, in *Fast Cars, Clean Bodies* (Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 1995), pp. 163-165.

6.3.2. Mainstream Post-May '68 Political Film

By believing that it is possible to infiltrate dominant cinema, Lebel defended the now well established genre of the mainstream left-wing fiction film, epitomised in France by Costa-Gavras's *Z*, but which was already a successful genre in Italy.¹²² Yet this is also the weakest aspect of his demonstration. Lebel chooses Costa-Gavras's commercially successful *Z* as an example of an efficient attempt to counteract dominant ideology, as it was able to drive home a radical message to a wide audience. Lebel claims that there is no ideal political film: 'Costa-Gavras's *Z* was not be judged by the yardstick of Eisenstein's *La Ligne générale* or a militant film but in comparison with *La Grande Vadrouille*. There lay its specific difference.'¹²³ *Z* had been successful within the limitations of its production and formal specificity. But what was acceptable for *Z* was not so for *L'Aveu*, Costa-Gavras's subsequent film written also with Jorge Semprun. *Z* denounced the colonels' coup in Greece, whereas *L'Aveu* highlighted the 1950s Stalinist purges in Czechoslovakia. Both films starred Yves Montand and may be classified as 'political thrillers', therefore sticking to the same mainstream aesthetical mode.

In the case of *Z*, the methods were justified in so far as the film was manifestly going against dominant ideology. In spite of their inherent schematism, these methods brought to the film the punch which was necessary to overcome, in every spectator, the barrier of dominant ideology, by using the very methods the latter has often availed of. The 'political thriller' dimension of the film did not take away from the general ideological impact of the film, but, on the contrary, allowed it to play on its public's ideological configuration. While the aesthetic methods used were not the only ones which could be applied, at least, in terms of the 'ideological impact' the film had set itself to achieve (that is to reach the widest public possible) they did not play against what these methods were expected to do. Indeed they favoured active reflection insofar as they allowed certain questions, kept under wrap by the dominant ideology, to come to the spectator's consciousness. If, in *Z*, these means led to a

¹²² The films of Costa-Gavras exemplified a model of political film-making which sought to bend mainstream Hollywood conventions to radical political ends. In doing so they attempted to sugar the pill of radical politics with the 'entertainment' provided by the conventions of the thriller. For supporters of the political thriller, their great strength was their ability both to reach and to maintain interest of an audience who would normally be turned off by politics, in John Hill, 'The Political Thriller Debate', in *The Oxford Guide to Film Studies* ed. by John Hill and Pamela Church Gibson (London: Oxford, 1998), p. 114; *Encyclopedia of European Cinema*, ed. by Ginette Vincendeau (London: Cassell/BFI, 1995), p. 95.

¹²³ Lebel, *Cinéma et idéologie*, p. 86.

certain awareness — instead of preventing it as it was hastily said in some leftist quarters — it was because the film as a whole challenged dominant ideology.¹²⁴

But in the case of *L'Aveu*, Lebel considers that the 'subject of the film and the way it deals with the issues it raises, are closely akin to the thematic of the dominant ideology. The film is too close to the slippery road of dominant ideology not to risk being carried away by it. That's what happened.'¹²⁵ For Lebel, the film is much too simple, too spectacular, too absurd, and plays too much on the audience's emotions that it prevents any active reflection from taking place. The film delivers ready-made ideological outlines which correspond to the dominant ideology's point of view. The contradiction and the limits of Lebel's argument become thus apparent: the very aesthetic means put to use in *Z*, and praised by Lebel, become the vehicles of dominant ideology in *L'Aveu* and are now vilified by the same writer. The line seems difficult to sustain. How can Lebel describe some aesthetic methods as designed specifically to suit the needs of the dominant ideology but at the same time of some benefit when the film's subject-matter challenges in any way the dominant ideology? This echoes the debate which took place twenty years before between Sadoul and Bazin on the question of form and content.¹²⁶ Lebel's position seems to endorse very strongly the notion that the subject-matter — and that the subject-matter alone — decides on the Marxist, revolutionary nature, of a film. Comolli also wrote about *L'Aveu*. For the *Cahiers*, Costa-Gavras's filmic lack of substance (*inconsistance*) determines its political message and makes it an instrument of dominant ideology.¹²⁷ Comolli and Lebel both reach the conclusion that *L'Aveu* is an anti-Communist film. Comolli is nevertheless more consistent in his criticism of the 'political thriller' as he points to the alleged inherent ideological flaw of its form. Lebel ends up criticising the formal aspect of the film not per se, but because of the film content. Indeed, his position confirmed the traditional attachment of the French Communist critics to the *film à*

¹²⁴ Ibid., pp. 181-182

¹²⁵ Ibid., pp. 182-185. See also Jeanine Verdès-Leroux, *Le Réveil des somnambules: Le PC, les intellectuels et la culture 1956-1985* (Paris: Fayard, 1987), pp. 337-340.

¹²⁶ See chapter 2, pp. 110-117.

¹²⁷ Jean-Louis Comolli, 'Film/Politique (2) — *L'Aveu*: quinze propositions', *Cahiers du cinéma*, n° 224, October 1970, pp. 48-51.

thèse genre noticeable in the 1950s, and very much alive today.¹²⁸ While mainstream left-wing political films were approved by the majority of Communist critics, *La Nouvelle Critique* showed once again its difference.¹²⁹ In their article 'Cinéma: Série Z' — a transparent allusion to Costa-Gavras's film — Fieschi and Breton look at Jean-Pierre Mocky's *L'Albatros*, Yves Boisset's *Le Saut de l'ange* and Philippe Labro's *Sans mobile apparent* and conclude their analysis by denouncing the political thrillers as 'politically naive' and as 'the unconscious accomplices of the ideology they claim to explore.'¹³⁰ This position invalidated Lebel's opinion on the possibility of infiltrating 'dominant ideology' and is yet another sign of *La Nouvelle Critique*'s independence of mind.¹³¹

Obviously, given the argumentative climate of the time, Lebel's book prompted critical reactions from his targets' quarters.¹³² In fact, *Cahiers* and *Cinéthique* did not recognise any value in Lebel's argumentation. The signatories of Porretta Terme declaration lambasted 'the revisionist pseudo-theoretician Lebel, propelled onto the theory stage only to oppose the film journals where a real theoretical reflection takes place.'¹³³ In *Cahiers*, Jean-Louis Comolli published a series of six articles, entitled '*Technique et idéologie: caméra, perspective, profondeur de champ*', in which he disputes the idea of neutrality in film

¹²⁸ See chapter 8, in particular the reviews of Bertrand Tavernier's 1999 *Ça commence aujourd'hui*, p. 326.

¹²⁹ Lachize in *L'Humanité*, 26 February 1969 and Capdenac in *Les Lettres françaises*, praised Z very highly, 5-11 March 1969, pp. 15-16.

¹³⁰ Émile Breton and Jean-André Fieschi, 'Cinéma: série Z', *La Nouvelle Critique*, n° 49, January 1972, pp. 74-81. Their argumentation is very close to John Hill's: 'The tendency towards personalization which is encouraged by the conventions of narrative realism is reinforced by the specific properties of the crime thriller, especially when it is structured around the investigation of an individual detective and his quest to reveal, or make visible, the truth behind a crime and an enigma. Moreover as a number of critics have suggested, the detective story formula is also characteristically a conservative one. It depends upon the superior powers (either intellectual or physical) of an individual investigator (who is often a loner) and, in doing so, prefers the values of individualism to those of the community. Opponents of the political thriller have argued that, by virtue of a reliance upon individual characters and stars with whom we identify, and upon the tightly structured patterns of the narrative suspense which engage us emotionally rather than intellectually, the political thriller "makes up or mind for us". It may challenge the prevailing ideologies of society, but it does so by employing the same emotional patterns of involvement as films which offer the contrary view, and hence fails to encourage audiences to engage critically with political ideas', 'The Political Thriller Debate', *The Oxford Guide to Film Studies*, pp. 114-115.

¹³¹ An independence of mind which had its limits. Frédérique Matonti mentions that the journal was criticised by the Party's direction because it did not wholeheartedly back *Beau Masque*, a film based on Roger Vailland's novel and made by Bernard Paul who was close to the Party. Matonti, p. 380.

¹³² See Casetti, pp. 217-220.

¹³³ Pascal Bonitzer, Jean-Louis Comolli, Jean Narboni, 'Porretta Terme 2', *Cahiers du cinéma*, n° 233, November 1971, pp. 46-47.

technique and explains that technique follows ideology and that ideology presides over technical (camera) or formal (depth of field) discoveries.¹³⁴ Lebel's positions were considered as expressing the PCF's. Thus, according to Christian Zimmer, Lebel's theoretical stance closely corresponded to the PCF's political agenda. Zimmer considers that 'the result of Lebel's system, if not its goal, is to clear a number of capitalist institutions which may be of use in order to gain power through legal and peaceful means. The Party's attitude in the film domain reflects its overall attitude, while Lebel, in his book, tries hard to cleanse the film apparatus of the original ideological deficiency. It is then clear to see the purpose of this theory of political cinema. It fits into the idea of a revolution without violence, an access to power along a strictly legitimate path. As if bourgeois institutions were neutral (a point which is rightly contested by Alain Krivine). This refusal of violence finds its translation, with all its illusory glory, in the domain of film theory.'¹³⁵ Zimmer contests the real efficiency of 'the trouble-free insertion of a political discourse in an official discourse'.¹³⁶ In other words, he does not believe that there could be any positive ideological benefit in using the tools of dominant ideology. 'The conception of culture implied in such theories conforms to the Party line as defined by Roland Leroy in *La Culture au présent*. The forms of bourgeois culture are not criticised or questioned at all. There is only one culture, neutral, ideologically virginal, innocent. A culture which is a commodity which may be acquired, shared between exploiters and exploitees, oppressors and oppressees. Thus proletarian culture would be nothing other than bourgeois culture in the hands of the proletariat.'¹³⁷ Zimmer gives a far left political reading of Lebel's *Cinéma et Idéologie*. The extreme antagonism of the Communist and the far left positions informed all aspects of French cinema. As politics re-entered French cinema with a vengeance, militant cinema underwent quite a boom after May '68 and there as well, the PCF was a focus point.

¹³⁴ Jean-Louis Comolli, 'Technique et idéologie: caméra, perspective, profondeur de champ', *Cahiers du Cinéma*, n° 229, May 1971, pp. 4-21; *ibid.*, n° 231, August-September 1971, pp. 42-49; *ibid.*, n° 233, November 1971, pp. 39-45; *ibid.*, n° 234-235, December 71-January-February 1972, pp. 94-100; *ibid.*, n° 241, September-October 1972, pp. 20-24.

¹³⁵ Christian Zimmer, *Cinéma et Politique* (Paris: Seghers, 1974), p. 253.

¹³⁶ *Ibid.*

¹³⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 255.

6.3.3. Militant Cinema

As they were few fiction films which could be regarded as vehicles of *gauchiste* ideology and even fewer which corresponded closely to the PCF's discourse, militant cinema became a forum where each could express their respective views. It will come as no surprise that films such as Marin Karmitz's *Camarades* (1970) or *Coup pour coup* (1972) as well as René Gilson's *On n'arrête pas le printemps* (1972) or Claude Faraldo's *Bof, anatomie d'un livreur* (1971), received little attention from Communist critics and were dismissed as *gauchiste* propaganda playing into the hands of the bourgeoisie.¹³⁸ It should also be said that the same films were also criticised by *Cahiers* and *Cinéthique* for not disrupting the canons of dominant cinema's aestheticism enough.¹³⁹ On the contrary, 'Everyone will agree that May '68 marked the beginning of a decisive resurrection of French militant cinema', Guy Hennebelle writes ten years after May '68.¹⁴⁰ He is undoubtedly right. With regard to the wave of political and militant films which began to emerge in the aftermath of the May events, the debate as to who was entitled to claim being the true and sole spokesperson of the struggling workers took on a new impetus. In the realm of militant cinema, the accusation that the PCF was not sufficiently involved was stronger than anywhere else. There was little room for finding a common ground. Each group was sure of holding the truth, of being right against everyone else. It suffices to look at *Cinéma militant*, edited by Guy Hennebelle in 1976, in order to see a comprehensive list of militant films made either by far left groups or other leftist groups including the PCF. Many of these films dealt with industrial disputes, strikes, small farmers' social unrest as well as feminist, green or antimilitarist issues. In many instances, the PCF would be an important target, if not the main one, of these

¹³⁸ For *Coup pour coup*, see François Maurin, 'Cinéma malhonnête', *L'Humanité*, 4 March 1972; Albert Cervoni, 'La télécommande d'un nœud de cravate', *France Nouvelle*, n° 1369, 8-14 February 1972; Michel Capdenac, 'La parole aux ouvrières', *Les Lettres françaises*, 1 March 1972, pp. 13-14. For René Gilson's *On n'arrête pas le printemps*, see Albert Cervoni, 'Un néo-boyscoutisme', *L'Humanité*, 29 March 1972. For Claude Faraldo's *Bof, anatomie d'un livreur*, see François Maurin, 'D'un degré rarement atteint', *ibid.*, 20 March 1971.

¹³⁹ Groupe Lou Sin d'intervention idéologique, 'Coup pour coup: à la remorque du révisionnisme', *Cahiers du cinéma*, n° 238-239, May-June 1972, pp. 16-25.

¹⁴⁰ Guy Hennebelle, 'En attendant les (sur) lendemai qui chantent', *Impact*, n° 8-9, May 1978, pp. 22-23.

documentary films. In Jean-Pierre Thorn's *Oser lutter oser vaincre*, for instance, the PCF is repeatedly attacked for its alleged revisionism; Jean-Michel Humeau's *Mikono* in 1978 also contains an anti-PCF diatribe. While the *gauchiste* groups were very active and participated in numerous film collectives, the PCF also developed its own production company, Dynadia, which produced a number of films, among which *La CGT en Mai 68* directed by Paul Seban. These films defended the PCF's positions and decisions and were an answer to the numerous far left short films which kept accusing both the union and the Party of betrayal. The divisions which existed among the different political organisations and the acrimonious discussions which took place between them lasted for most of the decade. In 1977, a symposium in Rennes brought together the leading exponents and practitioners of militant cinema. The fact that it took nine years for the different film collectives to gather around the same table is a clear sign of their division. The debates were still marked by the lack of trust and understanding between the PCF and the far left. Ten years after the events, the *gauchistes* still held the same position with regard to the PCF, although they conceded that their own views might have been leaning too heavily on the dogmatic side.¹⁴¹ In 1978, Jacques Willemont, who was one of the co-film-makers of *Wonder, Mai 68*, brought out a special issue on the films of May '68. Willemont explains that he wanted to organise a film programme which would give an overall view of the wide range of discourses which were prominent in May '68. What he had in mind was that the confrontation of these different point of views would bring new light on this confusing and confused period. Yet, as he explains, he was unable to do so. It proved impossible to confront in the same programme the '*gauchiste*' views and that of the CGT for instance: 'Although our journal does not share the P'C'F's political line, we nevertheless favour confronting ideas rather than watching the narcissistic monologue of *Mai 68 par lui-même*. [...] In a way, this issue of *Impact* is a response to all those who pretend to be the only keeper of the truth of May '68. May '68,

¹⁴¹ *Cinéma et Politique, du cinéma d'auteur au cinéma d'intervention*, Actes des Journées du cinéma militant de la Maison de la Culture de Rennes, 1977-78-79 (Paris: Édition Papyrus, 1979), p. 47.

let's not forget, was larger, bigger, more varied, more imaginative, more generous, than each and everyone of us has ever said.'¹⁴²

Whether it was produced by the far left film collectives or the PCF's own production company, militant cinema remained marginal even at a time of such intense politicisation as the late 1960s and 1970s. As Daniel Serceau explains: 'If May '68 has introduced the political domain to French cinema, the Left and the extreme left have not yet given it the structures it needs to reach a mass audience'.¹⁴³ Stressing that 'ten years of Gaullio-Giscardian power are not the only explanation for this', Serceau points to a number of factors. Many of these films would only be shown in art-house cinemas which thus became 'forums of social and political agitation and protest. But the films shown in that framework had a very small public and often the takings would not cover their cost of exploitation.' He also accuses 'the dogmatism of the revolutionary far left.' A similar point is made by Guy Hennebelle who discusses the reasons why militant films were often so boring. He mentions six points: the low budgets, their dogmatism which meant that everything had to fit in a Procrustean bed — 'For the last ten years, a number of films have aimed at changing society. They function more or less on the Leninist scheme of the big night (*Le grand soir*) which would be prepared by a revolutionary party which needed to be reinvented since the P'C'F was no longer assuming this role —, with a reliance on direct-cinema based on the simplistic ideology of "let's give the people the right to speak", a refusal of the notion of spectacle too hastily assimilated to dominant cinema, an erroneous conception of collective creation which led to the levelling down of individual inspiration, an insufficient reflection of aesthetic issues as well as an excessive influence of the deconstruction theories.'¹⁴⁴ He ends on a bitter pessimistic note as he considers that militant cinema has failed neither in aesthetic nor in political terms, but in moral terms: 'We have been unable to institute among ourselves

¹⁴² *Mai 68 par lui-même* was a programme put together by the directing teams of the following films: *Oser lutter, oser vaincre*; *Le Droit à la parole*; *Grands soirs, petits matins*; *Cheminots à la Sorbonne*; *Sergent Mikono*; *Joli mois de mai*; *Sochaux, 11 juin 1968*, in Jacques Willemont, *Impact*, n° 8 and 9, May 1978, p. 3.

¹⁴³ Daniel Serceau, 'Les salles commerciales aussi', *Impact*, n° 8 and 9, May 1978, pp. 23-24.

¹⁴⁴ Guy Hennebelle, 'En attendant les (sur) lendemains qui chantent', *Impact*, n° 8 and 9, May 1978, pp. 22-23.

relationships that differ from the 'Struggle for life' model. Everyone knows what hides behind great revolutionary statements about the coming of a new society and a new man: that good old ambitiousness, traditional jealousy and never-ending rivalry.'¹⁴⁵ There is one personality in French cinema which this part of the study has still not dealt with and that is Jean-Luc Godard. Yet Godard stood at the centre of all the major debates of the May '68 period: Maoism, militant cinema, auteur film, etc. The Communist reception of Godard since the New Wave confirms the analysis developed heretofore.

6.3.4. The Communist Critics and Jean-Luc Godard: le Mépris or Tout Va Bien?

Of all the film personalities who marked the May '68 period, Jean-Luc Godard stands out the most as he epitomised the radical shift which occurred at the time. From the respected idiosyncratic auteur he was in the 1960s, Godard developed in the direction of film activism and anti-auteur rebellion through his involvement in the film collective Dziga Vertov. Godard was the anti-Costa-Gavras.¹⁴⁶ It was with disappointment that the Communist critics witnessed the evolution of the director of *A bout de souffle*. Lebel wondered whether Godard's move towards film practice outside the reigning system was really an ideological and aesthetic step forward: 'Godard may have become personally freer in his film-making but his films are now confidential.'¹⁴⁷ What Lebel reproaches Godard with is his move towards a 'pseudo-materialism' in keeping with the theoretical drift of *Cahiers* and *Cinéthique* theoretical wanderings.¹⁴⁸ This feeling of disappointment can be understood if one looks at Godard's pre-May '68 years. Godard had become the ideal auteur — independently-minded, yet more and more politically aware — in the post-Argenteuil era of the PCF. Cervoni's 1965

¹⁴⁵ Ibid.

¹⁴⁶ 'Two directors seemed to crystallize the choices at hand: Godard demonstrated an insistence on the need for revolutionary messages (or content) to be accompanied by an appropriate revolutionary form (the other one is Costa-Gavras)', John Hill, 'The Political Thriller Debate', in *The Oxford Guide to Film Studies*, p. 114.

¹⁴⁷ Lebel, *Cinéma et idéologie* p. 87. None of the following Godard films were reviewed in *L'Humanité*: *Le Gai Savoir*, *Cinéma*, *Un Film comme les autres*, *One American Movie*, *One A.M.*, *British Sounds*, *Pravda*, *Vent d'Est*, *Luttes en Italie*, *Jusqu'à la victoire*, *Vladimir et Rosa*. *Vladimir et Rosa* was reviewed by Breton in *La Nouvelle Critique*, n° 45, June 1971, p. 93.

¹⁴⁸ Lebel, pp. 44-49.

text contained a defence of Godard as an auteur.¹⁴⁹ Most of Godard's post-New Wave films received positive reviews in the Communist press. Sadoul liked *Les Carabiniers*: 'A mere sketch hastily thrown on paper is sometimes more revealing of an artist and his feelings than a more elaborate painting'.¹⁵⁰ Nevertheless for Armand Monjo, 'it is simply a disappointing anarchist pochade, the satire of the beginning turns into a brilliant but vain game for society nihilists.'¹⁵¹ Sadoul likes *Le Mépris* but asks for a few weeks of reflection before coming to a definitive judgement as it is both an irritating and fascinating film.¹⁵² *Une Femme mariée* is well and positively covered by the Communist papers, especially since it fell victim of the government's censorship.¹⁵³ While Lachize enjoyed *Masculin-féminin* for its personal yet sympathetic portrait of young Communists, Sadoul agreed with Pierre Daix who found the film as beautiful as Diderot's *Le Neveu de Rameau*.¹⁵⁴ Sadoul compared the impact of *Made in USA* with Picasso's *Guernica* and the films Godard made in the 1960s with Renoir's in the 1930s as they 'make up a social picture of 5th Republic France'.¹⁵⁵ *Week-end* was praised by Lachize for its innovation: 'Whether or not one likes Godard's approach, it must be acknowledged that he keeps bringing something new to film art. he helps the spectator to become adult and his greatest merit is that he flatters no one.'¹⁵⁶ It should come as no surprise that *Les Lettres françaises* were particularly sympathetic towards Godard as

¹⁴⁹ See present chapter, p. 216.

¹⁵⁰ Sadoul, 'Les Carabiniers: Un croquis m'en dit plus qu'un long rapport', *Les Lettres françaises*, n° 981, 6-11 June 1963, p. 8.

¹⁵¹ Armand Monjo, *L'Humanité*, 2 June 1963. Armand Monjo's conservatism is not a surprise, see chapter 4, p. 145.

¹⁵² Sadoul, 'Étrange mais vrai', *Les Lettres françaises*, n°1009, 26 December 1963, p. 7; Michel Mardore, 'Interview avec Jean-Luc Godard: Jean-Luc Godard a repeint dans *Le Mépris* le sourire des statues grecques', *ibid.*, pp. 1 & 7.

¹⁵³ Alain Vanier, 'Interview with Jean-Luc Godard: "Une vision fragmentée du monde"', *Les Lettres françaises*, 17 September 1964, p. 1; Sadoul, 'Une femme mariée', *Les Lettres françaises*, 17 September 1964; 'Jean-Luc Godard et la censure', *ibid.*, 8 October 1964, p. 9; Cervoni, 'L'âge de Nylon', *France Nouvelle*, n° 999, 9-15 December 1964, pp. 22-23; Lachize, 'Choque-qui-peut', *L'Humanité*, 12 December 1964; Godard, 'Dialogues d'*Une Femme mariée*', *Les Lettres françaises*, 10-16 December 1964, pp. 1 & 12; Sadoul, 'Le doigt sur la plaie', *ibid.*, p. 11.

¹⁵⁴ Lachize, 'Godard à l'état pur', *L'Humanité*, 27 April 1966; Pierre Daix, 'Interview with Jean-Luc Godard: "Ce que j'ai à dire"', *Les Lettres françaises*, 21-27 April 1966, pp. 1 & 16; Sadoul, 'Godard ne passera pas', *Les Lettres françaises*, 5 May 1966, p. 18.

¹⁵⁵ Daix, 'Ce que Godard nous jette à la figure', *Les Lettres françaises*, 22-28 December, pp. 35-36; Sadoul, 'Les Facettes d'un miroir brisé', *ibid.*, n° 1163, 29 December 1966, pp. 21 & 24.

¹⁵⁶ Lachize, 'Le rire grinçant de Jean-Luc Godard', *L'Humanité*, 3 January 1968. See also Capdenac, 'Petit lexique pour *Week-end*', *Les Lettres françaises*, 3 January 1968, p. 15.

their director, Aragon, was particularly fond of him.¹⁵⁷ But the ultimate accolade came with *Pierrot le fou*. In an ecstatic article following the release of the film, 'Qu'est-ce que l'art, Jean-Luc Godard?', Aragon raised Godard to the status of Delacroix and Rimbaud: 'I am very fond of language and this why I am very fond of Godard, who is all language. I think this film is beautifully sublime'.¹⁵⁸ References to Diderot, Delacroix, Rimbaud and Picasso, were signs of the persistence of the Communist discourse on national culture in the 1960s. It must not be forgotten that Aragon's fondness for Godard was not shared by all Communist critics. In the early 1960s, *Miroir du cinéma* disliked Godard, 'merely preoccupied by his cult of personality' and complained of Aragon's 'master voice'.¹⁵⁹ *Deux ou trois choses que je sais d'elle* was equally well received by Sadoul, who, this time, compares Godard with Vertov; Lachize's review in *L'Humanité* is much more content-based as he concludes that, 'had Godard known Sarcelles when it had a Communist mayor, he would have made a different film'.¹⁶⁰

La Chinoise was a turning point. Daix gave a positive review of the film in *Les Lettres françaises*, of which he was the editor in chief. What Daix appreciated in the film is the fact that young people talked about revolution, asked questions, good or bad.¹⁶¹ This good review resulted in Daix's being summoned to appear before Roland Leroy who was in charge of the intellectuals in the Party and who thought it was a Maoist film.¹⁶² But at the same time *La Nouvelle Critique* criticised Godard as a 'dangerous structuralist' and 'a *gauchiste* idol'.¹⁶³ Yet, this should not be read as an indication of dogmatism but as the consequence

¹⁵⁷ See Aragon, 'Les clefs', *Les Lettres françaises*, n° 1015, 12 February 1964, p. 1 & 8-9 and 'Collages dans le roman et dans le film', *ibid.*, n° 1072, 18-24 March 1965, pp. 1 & 14.

¹⁵⁸ Aragon, 'Qu'est-ce que l'art, Jean-Luc Godard ?', *Les Lettres françaises*, n° 1096, 9 September 1965, pp. 1 & 8.

¹⁵⁹ See this chapter, p. 222 and Jean-Marc Aucuy's review of *Le Mépris*, *Miroir du cinéma*, n° 8-9, p. 36.

¹⁶⁰ Jean-Luc Godard commente *Deux ou trois choses que je sais d'elle*, *Les Lettres françaises*, 16 March 1967, pp. 1 & 20; Truffaut, 'Deux ou trois choses que je sais de lui', *ibid.*, pp. 1 & 21; Sadoul, 'Deux ou trois choses d'un grand ensemble', *ibid.*, 23 March 1967, pp. 20 & 22; Lachize, 'Dommage qu'elle soit une prostituée', *L'Humanité*, 22 March 1967.

¹⁶¹ Daix, 'A propos de *La Chinoise*', *Les Lettres françaises*, 6 September 1967, pp. 18-19.

¹⁶² Matonti, pp. 381-382. See J. D., 'Deux ou trois choses qu'on saura de lui, de Godard', *La Nouvelle Critique*, n° 4, May 1967, p. 18. Funnily enough Michèle Daria in *L'Humanité Nouvelle*, a *gauchiste* paper, considered *La Chinoise* to be a reactionary film, quoted in *Rivarol*, 21 November 1967.

¹⁶³ Matonti, pp. 381-382.

of their willingness to distance themselves from *Les Lettres françaises* which, Matonti reminds us, 'were closer to the literary and film avant-gardes as well as the structuralist movement, were ahead in terms of putting forward the PCF's new cultural policy, insofar as the journal was opened to views coming from outside the Communist sphere.'¹⁶⁴ In fact, Lebel considers that *Le Mépris*, *Pierrot le fou* and *La Chinoise* were 'Godard peaks' insofar as they were the more accomplished and the more balanced results of his aesthetic research.¹⁶⁵ Godard's defection towards Maoism, so to speak, was therefore deeply felt by the Communist critics. When *Tout va bien*, the first large scale commercial release by Godard — and Jean-Pierre Gorin — since *La Chinoise*, the Communist press was very negative.¹⁶⁶ Undoubtedly the film is critical of the CGT and the PCF.¹⁶⁷ Once again, *La Nouvelle Critique* tried to go beyond a merely political reception of the film and devoted nine pages to an analysis of the film, five months after it came out.¹⁶⁸ Eisenschitz discusses the aesthetic qualities of the film, praising Godard for having avoided a naturalist approach. Eduardo de Gregorio looks at the film's montage and concludes that Godard's 1960s work was more interesting. Breton provides a Marxist reading of the film in which he sees Godard-Gorin's film as a mark of the failure of *gauchiste* ideology. Finally Michel Marie analyses how the film is the result of a variety of theoretical and practical experimentation, which cancels its so-called political message and explains the bourgeois press's disappointed reception.¹⁶⁹

¹⁶⁴ Matonti, p. 70.

¹⁶⁵ Lebel, p. 45.

¹⁶⁶ François Maurin, *L'Humanité*, 29 April 1972; Lachize, *L'Humanité Dimanche*, 14 May 1972, Capdenac, *Les Lettres françaises*, 10-16 May 1972, pp. 1 & 14-15. On the reception of *Tout va bien* by the French press as a whole, see Pierre Baudry, 'La critique et *Tout va bien*', *Cahiers du cinéma*, n° 240, July-August 1972, pp. 10-18.

¹⁶⁷ The brother of Yves Montand, the 'hero' of the film, was a CGT activist. See Matonti, pp. 381-382.

¹⁶⁸ Bernard Eisenschitz, '*Tout va bien*: un film 'plein de talent''; Eduardo de Gregorio, 'Sur le dispositif du film'; Émile Breton, 'Sur le programme politique', pp. 64-70; Michel Marie, 'Qu'est-ce qui ne va donc pas', pp. 71-72, *La Nouvelle Critique*, n° 56, September 1972, pp. 64-72.

¹⁶⁹ Incidentally, Marie remarks that the 'revisionists' of *Tout va bien* correspond to the traditional worker figure of French cinema, i.e. Jean Gabin in his *Belle Equipe* period, whereas the factory's rebels are more of the sympathetic moustache and beard-wearing youth type, p. 72.

The reception of *Tout va bien* exemplifies the May '68 period. With today's hindsight, it is difficult to comprehend fully *La Nouvelle Critique's* review of the film or Baudry's answer to the reactions it triggered in 1972. For *Cahiers* and *Cinéthique* the period of Marxist fundamentalism was only beginning. In fact as both journals plunged further into the political debate, intensifying their anti-PCF campaigns throughout most of the 1970s, they seem to have forsaken cinema altogether, leaving less and less space to discuss film.¹⁷⁰ In the case of *Cahiers* not only did they lose sight of films, they also almost lost their entire readership.¹⁷¹ As Jean-Pierre Jeancolas wittily describes, this intense Marxist theoretical debate seems to have left most of the public unable to relate to it and most of the films produced at the time with a tiny audience: 'The denser the debates the deeper they descended into the darkness of a theoretical ocean — or aquarium, if one wants to scale down the picture. The immersion varied with the degree of involvement of the different protagonists. The most involved were moving about with difficulty in waters so deep and dense that they would lose their ability to see the initial object of their investigation. Their tools of investigation borrowed from the elementary Marxist schemes of thought, from dead branches which claimed to actualise them (Mao Zedong's at the time of the Great Chinese Proletarian Cultural Revolution), or from finer and more alive branches coming out of the same trunk (Althusser's analyses), spiced up with pinches of Freudionism or Structuralism. These were applied indifferently to texts, paintings or films. It must be said that, for most of them, the artists who created those artefacts were themselves swimming in the same aquarium.'¹⁷²

¹⁷⁰ In *Cahiers* see for instance, 'Politique et lutte idéologique de classes, intervention 1', *Cahiers du cinéma*, n° 234-235, December 1971-January-February 1972, pp. 5-14; Groupe Lou Sin d'intervention idéologique, 'Combattons le révisionnisme dans la culture', *ibid.*, n° 242-243, November-December 1972 and January 1973, pp. 24-69; 'Les luttes dans la conjoncture', *ibid.*, n° 245-246, April-May-June 1973, pp. 7-14; *ibid.*, n° 245-246, April-May-June 1973, pp. 31-42. In *Cinéthique* see for instance, 'Politiques de la censure', *Cinéthique*, n° 11, 4th quarter 1971, pp. 1-24; 'Politiques de la censure', *ibid.*, n° 13, 2nd semester 1972, pp. 1-26; 'Pratiques artistiques et luttes des classes', *ibid.*, pp. 40-63; *ibid.*, n° 9-10; 'Orientation — Perspectives', *ibid.*, n° 17-18, 1st semester 1974, pp. 1-18; 'La situation actuelle et nos tâches', *ibid.*, n° 19-20, 2nd semester 1975, pp. 1-15; 'Fondements pour un travail culturel Communiste', *ibid.*, n° 23-24, 2nd semester 1977, pp. 75-81; 'Le PCF et ses films: 1936-1945-1968', *ibid.*, n° 27-28, 1980, pp. 121-128.

¹⁷¹ N° 228 of April 1971: 11561 issues sold, in February 1973, 3403 with only 387 in Paris, 947 in the rest of France, and 1069 abroad, Baecque, pp. 225-226.

¹⁷² Jean-Pierre Jeancolas, 'Requalifier le politique', *Positif*, n° 455, January 1999, pp. 46-48.

During this period, the French Communist critics did not plunge as deep as their far left colleagues. Yet as *Les Lettres françaises* and *La Nouvelle Critique* testify, a more rigorous critical stance finally developed in answer to Cervoni's early call. Yet the autonomy of these journals remained relative. The Party stopped the publication of *Les Lettres françaises* on 10 October 1972, after a period of financial difficulties which indirectly resulted from the journal's stance over the soviet invasion of Czechoslovakia.¹⁷³ Breton has not forgotten that everything was fine providing that 'one did not strike near the knuckle', by which he means that if critics touched on political issues, they had to be particularly careful to avoid difficulties with the Party's direction.¹⁷⁴ Matonti rightly mentions a return to a more content-based criticism in *La Nouvelle Critique* as well as a new emphasis on French cinema from the year 1973 onwards.¹⁷⁵ Nevertheless, notwithstanding the conflict between *Cahiers* and the Communist monthly, 'the second rupture with the avant-garde', and given *Cahiers*'s and *Cinéthique*'s abyssal dogmatism, *La Nouvelle Critique* continued to present a high theoretical profile over the years, discussing films which *Cahiers* or *Cinéthique* did not consider worthy of comment.¹⁷⁶

When *Cinéthique* interviewed Paul Seban, the first question they asked him was: 'In your film *La CGT en Mai 68*, *La Vache et le prisonnier* (with Fernandel), is shown to the workers on strike.'¹⁷⁷ This conjuncture throws remarkable light on the principle contradiction of the complex process of relations between cinema and politics.' To which Seban replies: 'I kept this passage because it's part of the reality...'¹⁷⁸ The variety of positions, the contradictions and disagreements, among the Party's critics, bear testimony to their difficulty in reconciling the search for an intellectual avant-garde position with the desire and expectations of the majority of its members and sympathisers and with the defence of the film industry's working class and its category-specific interests. The diversity of Communist

¹⁷³ *Les Lettres françaises* were banned in the USSR and the Eastern bloc countries in 1969, Robrieux, vol. 4, pp. 808 and 820.

¹⁷⁴ Matonti, p. 384.

¹⁷⁵ Matonti, p. 374.

¹⁷⁶ See *La Nouvelle Critique*, 1972-1980.

¹⁷⁷ *La Vache et le prisonnier* was a very popular mainstream comedy directed in 1959 by Henri Verneuil.

¹⁷⁸ *Cinéthique*, n° 5, Sept-Oct 1969, pp. 9-13, transl. by Harvey, p. 139.

outlets might have helped in satisfying each category and no category of films had been neglected by the Communist press. This is both a sign of the continued recognition of the importance of cinema and also an indication that the PCF's critics flirtations with the avant-garde were bound to be limited in their impact. Avant-garde and 'Parti de masse' are oxymoronic terms as are Les Charlots and Pasolini or Jean Eustache. Having said that, the fact that French Communist critics responded to the demands of the avant-garde and defended more experimental auteurs shows how much they had evolved from the Zhdanovist and the New Wave years. In 1975, the writers of *Cinéma, culture ou profit* considered it a cultural and political duty for critics to back films which were not well distributed.¹⁷⁹ Looking at the different Communist journals, it seems to me that they fulfilled this ambition without alienating their readership. 'One must want to reach out to the public', Bertrand Tavernier declared in *La Nouvelle Critique* in 1976.¹⁸⁰ The advocates of the more extreme positions in political cinema failed to do so. Mainstream political films may have had some impact on their audience. If they did, it was not powerful enough to act on the political scene as France had to wait another twelve years to see a left-wing coalition gain power. It would take another generation before political and auteur cinema eventually came together again thanks to the films of the 'children of May '68'. Moreover this cinema met with a large audience, albeit an audience for whom Marxism and communism had lost most of their shine. The final chapter of this study will look at the place and positions of Communist critics in the late 1990s's conjuncture.

¹⁷⁹ Collectif de cinéastes communistes, *Cinéma, culture ou profit* (Paris: Éditions de la Nouvelle Critique, 1975), pp. 27-29.

¹⁸⁰ François Hincker, 'Bertrand Tavernier: Il faut vouloir atteindre le public', *La Nouvelle Critique*, n° 95, May 1976, pp. 82-83.

Part IV

Present Day

Chapter 7: Present Day: Film Policy

7.1. The PCF from Fossilisation to Transformation

Between the late 1970s and the early 1990s, the PCF underwent the traumatic experience of losing its status as main left-wing French political party and leading spokesperson of the working class while its electoral support fell by two-thirds. The break-up of the left-wing coalition in 1977 when the negotiations to update the Common Programme failed, resulted in the defeat of the Left in the 1978 legislative elections. More importantly, for the first time the Socialists fared better than the Communists with 24.9 percent of the votes against 21.4. Yet only three years later, the first left-wing president of the Fifth Republic was elected on 10 May 1981 in the person of François Mitterrand. With a majority of 51.7 per cent, the Socialist candidate beat right-wing Giscard d'Estaing thanks to the 'Republican discipline' by which left-wing parties called for a pro-Mitterrand vote on the second ballot. The general elections Mitterrand called in June in order to obtain a left-wing majority to implement his policy gave 16.1 per cent and 44 seats to the PCF, and 37 per cent and 283 seats to the PS. Although the 'pink landslide' meant that the PS enjoyed an absolute majority and could govern on its own, the PCF was offered 4 ministerial posts. In the 1981 Mauroy government, Charles Fiterman was in charge of Transport, Anicet Le Pors of the Civil Service, Marcel Rigout of Professional Education, and Jack Ralite of Health, while Socialist Jack Lang was given the Cultural Affairs portfolio. The post-election 'honeymoon period' was short-lived. Three years after Mitterrand's election, a decision to cut back on public expenditure (*'le tournant de la rigueur'*) coupled with a steady rise in unemployment figures led to the Communists' increasing uneasiness, which eventually caused them to leave office in 1984. The PCF entered another period of isolation during the first two *cohabitations* and the Socialist's five-year span in power following Mitterrand's re-election in 1988.¹ Between

¹ The term 'cohabitation' was first used when a Right-wing majority was voted in in 1986 under Mitterrand's presidency. For two years the French executive was shared by a Left-wing President and a Right-wing Prime Minister/Government/National Assembly. When such a case occurs, the president tends to take a back seat, as it were, while the Prime Minister's status is enhanced. The same circumstances resulted in the second cohabitation between 1993 and 1995. Since 1997 and to all accounts until 2002, France is experiencing its

1984 and 1995, the Communist Party evenly laid the blame for France's economic, social and cultural difficulties on both the Socialists and the right-wing parties in a way which reminded one of the 1950s period, when the PCF considered the Socialists and the Conservative parties as objective, pro-capitalist allies. In terms of popular support, this policy spelt disaster. The downward electoral spiral of French Communist votes has been well documented.² In 1986, the PCF's 9.6 per cent of the votes placed it behind Le Pen's far right National Front's 9.8 per cent. In 1988, André Lajoinie polled only 6.8 per cent, with the PCF faring slightly better in the subsequent legislative elections with 11.4 per cent, although the Party's number of seats was down to 27. In March 1993, the French Left suffered its worst electoral defeat since June 1968. The Socialists collapsed from 276 seats to 67 and the Communists from 11 to 9 per cent and 24 seats. Two years later Jacques Chirac beat Lionel Jospin in the 1995 presidential elections.

The reasons for the steep decline of the PCF rested mostly on its inability to change and its increasing fossilisation. Marchais remained the Party's Secretary-General for a quarter of a century and was replaced by Robert Hue in January 1994 during the PCF's 28th Congress.³ The conservatism of the PCF became more apparent when the Party embarked on another period of normalisation following the split of the Union of the Left and the brief but unconvincing Eurocommunist phase. Externally, Marchais's notorious declaration in 1979 that the 'balance-sheet of the Soviet Union was globally positive' was matched in turn by the support for Jaruzelski's coup in Poland in December 1981, the support of the invasion of Afghanistan by Soviet troops and the rather lukewarm support of Gorbachev's reforms.⁴ In

third period of cohabitation, but this time with a Socialist Prime Minister, Lionel Jospin, and a Right-wing President, Jacques Chirac.

² See for instance Danielle Tartakowski, *Une Histoire du PCF* (Paris, PUF, 1982), pp. 103-112; Roger Martelli, *Une Histoire sincère du PCF* (Paris: Messidor, 1984); Martin Adereth, *The French Communist Party: A Critical History* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1984); Stéphane Courtois and Marc Lazar, *Histoire du Parti Communiste Français* (Paris: PUF, 1995), pp. 397-417; D. S. Bell and Byron Criddle, *The French Communist Party in the Fifth Republic* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1994), pp. 99-123 and 217-229; Jean Ranger, 'Le Déclin du Parti Communiste Français', *Revue française de science politique*, n° 16, February 1986, pp. 46-63.

³ Although it would be easy to evoke Russian examples, the political longevity of Georges Marchais cannot be put down solely to the Party's practice. French politicians tend to have a longer lifespan than their Western European colleagues.

⁴ Tartakowski, p. 107; Robrieux, vol. IV, p. 861.

national terms, the worsening of the economic crisis affected a socially evolving French nation. This in turn provoked the PCF's loss of influence. In rapid decline, the French working class was no longer the close-knit society on which the French Communist movement had thrived.⁵ The Party's working class core vote was rapidly eroding.⁶ Social gloom spelt less solidarity, more 'every man for himself' reactions, and rampant racism. The PCF was now competing with the National Front for the protest votes. Internally the late 1970s proved quite grisly with numerous forced departures and straightforward expulsions from the Party.⁷ The 1980s were also a period of strife, with 'renovators' (*renovateurs*) and 'refounders' (*refondateurs*) and 'reconstructors' (*reconstructeurs*) trying, and more often than not failing, to have a say in the PCF's decision-making process.

As Sudhir Hazareesingh analyses in great detail in *Intellectuals and the French Communist Party*, the PCF's internal feud affected mostly Party's intellectuals.⁸ Outside the Party, French intellectuals' disaffection with the PCF was also due to the Party's stagnation but more importantly to its rekindled support for Eastern European regimes, at a time when Russian dissidents and the New Philosophers' denunciation of all types of totalitarianism made frequent headlines.⁹ Hazareesingh rightly points that before the legislative elections of 1978, the PCF was able to claim the support of many well-known public figures, including Gérard Depardieu, Stéphane Audran, Claude Chabrol and Georges Delerue. In 1984, the petition calling for a Communist vote at the European elections was almost entirely deprived of the signatures of public personalities.¹⁰ Coupled with the intellectuals' disapprobation of the PCF's attitude, the appeal of 'The Man with a Rose's drew away from the PCF many

⁵ See Michel Verret, 'Classe ouvrière, mouvement ouvrier. Où va le mouvement ouvrier français ?', *Communisme*, n° 28, 1990, pp. 40-48.

⁶ D. S. Bell and Byron Criddle, *The French Communist Party in the Fifth Republic* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1994), pp. 210-11.

⁷ On this particular aspect of the history of the PCF, see for instance Pierre Daix, *J'ai cru au matin* (Paris: Laffont, 1976); Jean Rony, *Trente ans de Parti. Un communiste s'interroge* (Paris: Bourgois, 1978); Maurice Goldring, *L'Accident : Un intellectuel communiste dans le débat du printemps 1978* (Paris: Éditions Sociales, 1978); Henri Fiszbin, *Les Bouches s'ouvrent : Une crise dans le PC* (Paris: Grasset, 1980); Jean-Pierre Gaudard, *Les Orphelins du PC* (Paris: Belfond, 1986).

⁸ Sudhir Hazareesingh, *Intellectuals and the French Communist Party* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1991).

⁹ See Keith A. Reader, *Intellectuals and the Left in France since 1968* (Basingstoke: Macmillan, 1987), pp. 108-114.

¹⁰ Hazareesingh, p. 5.

intellectuals and artists who were prone to feel more sympathy for Vaclav Havel's, Andrzej Wajda's or Andrey Tarkovsky's difficulties with their respective governments than for the Communist leadership.¹¹

For some commentators, the collapse of the Soviet Union and the demise of Eastern popular democracies should have been the last nail in the PCF's coffin. In 1993 Bell and Criddle considered that the Party's decline 'may have reached a point at which it was irreversible', though they are careful to underscore that 'the impact of the Communist Party, whether of its enduring presence or of its very decline, upon the rest of French political life, could still not be ignored.'¹² Their caution was justified. Six years later, in spite of the downfall of European and Soviet Communism, and poor national electoral results, three Communist ministers sit in France's cabinet and the French Communist Party is one of the components of the '*Gauche plurielle*', the French left-wing rainbow coalition composed of the PS, the PCF, the MDC (*Mouvement des Citoyens*) and the Green Party which has been in office since the legislative elections of May 1997. This 'recovery' can be seen as a concrete result of the evolution of the PCF.¹³ Under the leadership of its new National Secretary, Robert Hue, the PCF has engaged in an extensive and comprehensive rethinking of its position, its aim and *raison d'être*.¹⁴ Still in its early days, this era, which Hue has called the 'mutation era', is characterised by its openness towards the outside world.¹⁵ Thus, the 1170 delegates of the PCF's 29th Congress could, for the first time ever, participate in a public discussion with non Party-members. Among the external participants were well-know

¹¹ *L'Homme à la rose* is a song written by the late French singer Barbara as a tribute to François Mitterrand.

¹² D. S. Bell and Byron Criddle, *The French Communist Party in the Fifth Republic* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1994), p. 4.

¹³ This recovery has not been translated into electoral terms, but can be seen in satisfaction polls. While Hue has a much better public image than Marchais, the public is quite taken by the Communist ministers in particular Marie-George Buffet, in charge of Youth and Sports.

¹⁴ After the PCF's 29th Congress, the term Central Committee was replaced with National Committee, and Secretary-General with National Secretary. While it may seem a point of detail, it is nevertheless symptomatic of the PCF's mutation era. By forsaking the replacing Central with National, the Party is trying to shake off the very negative image of the Leninist concept of '*Centralisme démocratique*'. Democratic centralism refers to the organisation and structure of the PCF since its coming to existence. Its democracy deficiency is analysed in Bell and Criddle, pp. 6-30. By adopting the term National, the PCF reasserts its French credentials, a move made all the more urgent by the collapse of Eastern European Communism. The reception of Claude Berri's *Germinal* in 1993 will be examined in this light in next chapter.

¹⁵ See Robert Hue, *Communisme: la mutation* (Paris: Stock, 1995), *Il faut qu'on se parle* (Paris: Stock, 1997), *Communisme: un nouveau projet* (Paris: Stock, 1999).

intellectuals, such as Julia Kristeva, the anthropologist and sociologist Emmanuel Todd, the architect and urbanist Roland Castro, Stéphane Rozès, director of political studies at the CSA (*Centre des Statistiques de l'Audio-visuel*), as well as Francine de Lagorce, president of the charity organisation 'ATD-Quart-Monde'.¹⁶ In June 1999, the decidedly 'Euroconstructive' Communist list for the European elections, '*Bouge L'Europe*' — 'let's get moving Europe' — epitomised the Party's new direction. Not only was the list put forward by the Party more Euro-friendly, it also showed the PCF at its most pluralist ever. The 87-candidate list was based on a double parity principle: equal number of men and women, equal number of Party members and non-Party members.¹⁷ Of all French political parties, the PCF has always put forward the higher number of female candidates at any elections, therefore the gender parity was not such a surprising gesture, especially since the debate about imposing parity has been an on-going discussion in French society in the past number of years. On the contrary, the communist/non-communist parity came as the concrete expression of the Party leadership's endeavour to put its money where its mouth is. A noticeable example of the transformation of the Party was the presence on its list of Maurice Kriegel-Valrimont, a Resistance hero who had been expelled from the Party in 1961 under the accusation of being a traitor.¹⁸ Jorge Semprun's support for the list may also be seen as a sign of détente.¹⁹ Although the PCF had opened up its list in the 1994 European elections, the proportion of non-members was limited. In 1999, the 50/50 per cent ratio proved much

¹⁶ Claude Marchand, 'Nuit courte pour une journée bien remplie', *L'Humanité*, 21 December 1996, p. 3. The front page reads 'Le communisme du XXI^e siècle en débat'.

¹⁷ *L'Humanité*, 'La liste qui secoue le cocotier', 15 March 1999, pp. 1 and 3-6.

¹⁸ On the Party's new attitude towards ex-members who left for political reasons or were expelled, see Jean-Paul Pierrot, 'Maurice Kriegel-Valrimont: au nom de "l'unité de pensée"', *L'Humanité*, 24 June 1997; Bernard Frederick, 'Robert Hue à Georges Guinguoin: "Nous mesurons le tort qui vous a été fait"', *ibid.*, 13 February 1998; Pascal Virot, 'Les exclus du PCF refusent la main tendue de Hue', Pascal Virot, interview with Marc Lazar, 'Il ne s'agit pas d'une repentance', 'La disgrâce du camarade Kriegel-Valrimont', Jacques Amalric, 'Méthode Coué', Gilbert Laval, interview with Claude Llabrès, 'Retourner au PCF? Je suis mieux dehors', *Libération*, 30 november 1998, pp. 2-4; Daniel Sibony, 'Le PCF ou le ravalement des exclus', *ibid.*, 8 January 1999; Jean-Marie Argelès, Bernard Gibaud, Georges Heckli, Jean Massoni and Louis Régulier, 'Pour que le PCF évolue', *ibid.*, 12 January 1999 (the latter left the Party in 1979).

¹⁹ Jorge Semprun who had been a member of the Spanish Communist Party has been very critical of Communism from the 1960s onwards. This is illustrated by his participation in the writing of Resnais's 1967 *La Guerre est finie* and Costa-Gavras's 1969 *L'Aveu* for instance.

more problematic.²⁰ On the one hand many Party activists did not know what was happening and saw the move as the proof that the leadership was pushing innovation a bit too far. On the other, the Communist list was regarded as a bric-à-brac list showing that the PCF had lost all sense of direction and was unable to find its own place coming to the next Millennium. The reactions to the new phase in the evolution of the PCF have differed greatly within the Party. The '*Bouge L'Europe*' list fared poorly in the elections with only 6.7 per cent of the votes.²¹ This disappointing result has rekindled the debate within the PCF. The most conservative elements, who had greeted the mutation with some reluctance voiced their concern. Those who have supported it wholeheartedly right from the start — and often before — saw this process of modernisation as the only way forward for the Party.²²

Echoing the changes which have taken place in the PCF, the CGT as well has opened up and shaken off its image as a Cold War trade union. Louis Viannet, its last leader was instrumental in triggering the evolution of the union.²³ But, Bernard Thibault, its young new leader, exemplifies the new era.²⁴ One of Thibault's first decisions was to re-apply for the CGT to become part of the European Trade Union Confederation (ETCU).²⁵ Until then, the CGT had been affiliated to the Communist-controlled World Federation of Trade Union (WTFU). The successful application of the CGT to the ETCU constitutes both the end of the Cold War situation for European unions and the new attitude of the trade union towards Europe, on a par with the Communist new 'Euroconstructive' stance.²⁶

²⁰ For a very negative view on the PCF's list, see Éric Lecerf, 'Nouveaux amis du PCF, voici votre cavalier', *Libération*, 22 March 1999, p. 6.

²¹ France's results of the June 1999 European elections: total votes: 18 765 259; valid votes: 17 652 684, 43.9%; abstentions: 21 136 521, 53.2%. Results: PCF: 1 196 310, 6.7%; PS-MRG-MDC: 3 873 901, 21.9%; LO-LCR: 914 680, 5.1%; Verts: 1 715 550, 9.7%; UDF: 1 638 680, 9.28%; RPR-DL: 2 263 476, 12.8%; Pasqua/Villiers: 2 304 285, 13%; FN Le Pen: 1 005 225, 5.6%; MN Mégret: 578 774, 3.2%; CNPT: 1 195 760, 6.7%.

²² See *L'Humanité*, 25 June 1999, 29 June 1999 and following issues.

²³ See Christophe Forcari et Hervé Nathan, interview with Louis Viannet, 'Louis Viannet: ce qui a fait changer la CGT', *Libération*, 6 November 1998, pp. 24-25, and Christophe Forcari, 'Langue de sous-bois', *Libération*, 24 December 1998, last page. Significantly, in Autumn 1993, the CGT weekly, *V.O. La Vie ouvrière* changed its title to *L'Hebdo de l'actualité sociale, Vie Ouvrière* (n° 2561, 27 September- 3 October 1993 and 2562/1 1-7 October 1993).

²⁴ The transformation did not go so far as to appointing a non-Communist as leader of the CGT. Thibault joined the PCF in 1986. See Hervé Nathan, 'Le mécano de la centrale', *Libération*, Tuesday 16 March 1999, last page and Hervé Nathan, 'Thibault dans le texte', *Libération*, 5 February 1999, p. 24.

²⁵ 'La fin de la guerre froide syndicale', *L'Humanité*, n° 16979, 18 March 1999, p. 8.

²⁶ See Thomas Lemahieu, 'Bernard Thibault: "Mon premier congrès de la CES"', *L'Humanité*, 3 July 1999.

Moreover, in view of these changes, intellectuals and artists seem to be showing a renewed sympathy towards the PCF.²⁷ The Party's European list illustrated this renewed popularity with the presence of a number of artists and intellectuals.²⁸ While discreet in terms of number, the film sector was represented mainly by Aline Pailler's second candidature (9th on the list), Jean-Claude Petit (79th), who is known above all for his film scores and by Mitterrand's most popular brother-in-law, director and actor Roger Hanin who chaired the support committee (*comité de parrainage*).²⁹ In the previous 1994 elections, Aline Pailler, a non-Party member who was second on the list, was elected to the European Parliament where she became extremely active on film and audiovisual issues. Her work as an MEP, which will be studied in more detail below, has illustrated the evolution of the Communist discourse on French cinema of the last fifteen years. The PCF's transformation has been felt in terms of its policy on cultural matters, although in a less dramatic way. Indeed, it is the aim of this chapter to show that the Party's recovery in terms of its image towards intellectuals and artists goes back further than Hue's election and owes a lot to its continuous active involvement in successive battles for the defence of Culture. Through a survey of the campaigns the Party has been participating in over the last fifteen years, both the permanence and the shift of the Party's discourse on film and the audiovisual sector as a whole will be analysed. Thus the expression 'national culture' has taken a somewhat less nationalistic meaning in the 1990s. Similarly, it could be argued that the Party's new, more positive, stance on the European Community was heralded by the realisation of the European dimension of the French film industry. In addition, the new community of mind between the

²⁷ An illustration of this phenomenon is the composition of the association set up in support of the Party's daily which ran into deep financial difficulties. Among others, the actress Ariane Ascaride, the Jeannette of Guediguian's independent hit *Marius et Jeannette*, Jean-Claude Brisseau, Philippe Caubère, Robert Guediguian, André S. Labarthe, Gérard Mordillat, Aline Pailler, Jean-Claude Petit, Jacques Rozier, Gérard Oury and Bertrand Tavernier, are all members of 'Les Amis de *L'Humanité*'. See Ariane Ascaride, 'Clin d'oeil du matin', *L'Humanité*, n° 16976, 15 March 1999, p. 10; Gérard Mordillat, 'L'abréviation', *ibid.*, n° 16974, 12 March 1999, p. 12; Aline Pailler, *ibid.*, n° 16971, 9 March 1999, p. 14; Philippe Caubère, *ibid.*, n° 16972, 10 March 1999; Armand Gatti, *ibid.*, n° 16970, 8 March 1999, p. 12.

²⁸ Among the candidates were Geneviève Fraisse, philosopher; Aline Pailler, journalist; Stanislas Nordey, director; Bernard Lubat, musician; Michel Belletante, stage director; André Benedetto, author and actor; Jean-Claude Petit, composer and conductor; Anne Delbée, stage director and writer and Jean Vautrin, writer.

²⁹ Many people were contacted. Gérard Mordillat, Ariane Ascaride, Cédric Klapish, Nanni Moretti, all declined the offer to join the list, see 'Histoire secrète de la liste Hue-Fraisse', *L'Humanité Hebdo*, 20-21 March 1999, pp. 20-27.

Communist film personnel, the *Fédération du Spectacle* and the Communist critics, in relation to the current situation of French cinema will be examined. More importantly, the form which the PCF's commitment to the defence of French cinema has taken will be discussed as it has highlighted the extent and the limits of its engagement as well as society's perception of this involvement and of the Party as a whole, raising the question of the future role of the PCF itself. A clarification needs to be made at this point. Although there are still many differences between the media, the increasing role of television in all industrial aspects of cinema (production, distribution, exploitation), as well as the development of new communication channels cannot be denied. Consequently, 'film' and 'audiovisual' will be used as interchangeable terms from now on.

7.2. From 1981 to the First *États Généraux de la Culture*

Within six years of Mitterrand's first election as French president, the PCF, which had lost most of its appeal for the great majority of France's cultural world, was able to claim, although indirectly, the support of six thousand show-business artists at a public meeting for the defence of French culture. In a manner which is reminiscent of the battle against the Blum-Byrnes agreements, the PCF and the French film personnel came together once more as the result of a common fear and a common denunciation of the likely negative consequences of international commercial decisions for the audiovisual sector, decisions originally taken by a Socialist government, with the PCF back in opposition.

While the PCF was in government between 1981 and 1984, the PCF remained rather discreet in its attitude towards government policy for the audiovisual sector. As Minister for Culture of Pierre Maurois's government, Jack Lang gradually raised his budget, doubling it from 0.47 per cent to 0.75 per cent the first year, without reaching the one percent figure promised during the electoral campaign, and increasing the expenditure on cinema and the audiovisual from 35.2 to 120 million francs.³⁰ Moreover the strong and very public anti-

³⁰ David L. Looseley, *The Politics of Fun* (London: Berg Publishers, 1995), pp. 80-81. It is only in 1992 under Pierre Beregovoy's government, that the one per cent will be reached, *ibid*, p. 163. Jack Lang would be

American stance taken by Lang at the beginning of his mandate was probably welcomed by the PCF.³¹ That said, the PCF's trust towards Lang must have been somewhat less than blind if one is to judge by Jack Ralite's comment on Lang a year before they both sat around the same cabinet table: '[Lang]'s contempt for the Communists is only matched by his contempt for intellectuals, whom he reduces to the narrow circle of Parisian intelligentsia.'³² Obviously there was no love lost between the government's two Jacks. Another crisis affecting French cinema and controversial Socialist decisions affecting the French audiovisual sector (known in France as the PAF: *Paysage Audiovisuel Français*) would soon allow the PCF to become once again the defender of the French film world.

For the first four years of Lang's Ministry for Culture, French cinema managed to retain its audience. From 1969 to 1984 figures remain willy-nilly stable; there was even a considerable improvement in 1981.³³ But in 1985, figures started to drop dramatically.³⁴ Since it never rains but it pours, closure of cinemas around the country and a steep decrease in investment by distributors added to French cinema's misery, which also witnessed the American domination of its market increase in large proportion.³⁵ Finally, production figures went down the same road as audience figures, in 1981, 186 100%-French-produced films were made and only 72 in 1992, although if one includes coproductions the drop is marginally less abrupt with 231 in 1981 against 155 films ten years later. It is no surprise therefore that when the PCF, and Jack Ralite, its leading spokesperson on cultural matters, embarked on a new campaign for the defence of the French audiovisual sector, they found a sympathetic ear among this sector's personnel, especially in view of their well-established tradition of protest and their readiness to rally and fight back. From the year 1985 to the

the Minister for Culture of each Left-wing government under Mitterrand's two terms of office (Maurois 1 and 2, Fabius, Rocard, Cresson, Beregovoy).

³¹ Ibid, pp. 71-93.

³² Jack Ralite, 'Pas de Yalta culturel', in Parti communiste français, *Les Intellectuels, la Culture et la Révolution* (Paris Éditions sociales, 1980), pp. 264-271.

³³ 1969: 182.1, 1980: 174.8, 1981: 189.2, 1984: 190.8, in *Encyclopedia of European Cinema*, ed. by Ginette Vincendeau, (London: Cassell/BFI, 1996), pp. 466-467.

³⁴ 1985: 172.2, 1986: 163.4, 1987: 136.7, 1988: 124.7, 1989: 120.9, 1990: 121.8, 1991: 117, 1992: 115.9, *ibid*, p. 467.

³⁵ The French share went down from 49.5 per cent in 1981, to 44.3 per cent in 1985 and 30 per cent in 1991, in Looseley, p. 198.

present day, the PCF's renewed campaign in favour of the defence of the national audiovisual sector and the industry workforce's own engagement have taken place hand in hand.

Both Forbes and Looseley have underlined the contradictions of the Socialists' policy on the audiovisual sector.³⁶ After having sworn their attachment to the defence of public service and French production, within two years the Socialists set up a private subscription TV channel *Canal Plus* in 1984 and two Hertzian channels *La Cinq*, and *TV6* in 1986. Although these measures were aimed at boasting indigenous production, the Socialists' decision to open the French television network to private interests was a godsend to the PCF insofar as it rekindled the Communist traditional activism on audiovisual matters.³⁷ This was not difficult. In the late 1970s, of all political parties, the PCF was still recognised as the one which kept the closer eye on the sector.³⁸ No sooner had the decision to set up private stations been taken, *L'Humanité* raised the issue of the protection of France's national industry in terms which had been used in the previous decades: it was once more 'a question of life and death'.³⁹ The French Communist daily duly covered the mass meeting of artists and audiovisual professionals of 9 December 1985.⁴⁰ Of course, that Silvio Berlusconi was among the leaders of the consortium which won *La Cinq* did nothing to appease the PCF's concern. To put it in a nutshell, Berlusconi had murdered Italian cinema by taking over Italian TV and smothering it with cheap productions, many of which were of American or non-European origins.⁴¹

³⁶ See *French Cultural Studies*, ed. by Jill Forbes and Michael Kelly (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1995), pp. 232-35 and 258-63. For a more detailed account of Lang's audiovisual policy, see Looseley, pp. 197-211.

³⁷ *French Cultural Studies*, p. 234.

³⁸ See for instance, 'Le cinéma après le 19 mars', *Cinéma de France*, n° 22, February 1978; *Cinéma de France* mentions in 1978, that the PCF was the most precise in defining the reforms it advocates, more precise than any other party, 'Les partis politiques face à sept questions clés', *Le Film français*, n° 1715, 10 March 1978, pp. 10-11; Jack Ralite, 'Quatorze propositions du Parti communiste', *CinémAction*, 13 (Winter 1981), 69-71, Georges Marchais, 'A l'heure des satellites, la responsabilité publique n'a pas à s'évanouir', *Le Film français*, n° 1854, 17 April 1981, pp. 4-5 & 12.

³⁹ *L'Humanité*, 11 December 1985, p. 26.

⁴⁰ 'La création se rebiffe, débat ce soir à la Mutualité', *L'Humanité*, 9 December 1985; 'Mutualité Contre le coup de force du gouvernement qui veut imposer au pays la chaîne privée Seydoux-Berlusconi', *ibid.*, 10 December 1985, pp. 1 and 28, which reads 'the devastation is not inevitable'.

⁴¹ Figures are eloquent, Italian film audience figures: 1970: 525 million, 1980: 241.9, 1985: 123.1, 1992: 83.6, in Vincendeau, pp. 466-467. As for production the drop is less dramatic in terms of quantity, but

The anti-Socialist argument, reminiscent of the anti-Blum crusade, would often flare up in subsequent years.⁴² In the short term, soon after the right-wing electoral victory in 1986, François Léotard, Minister for Culture in Jacques Chirac's cohabitation government, announced the privatisation of French TV's first public channel, TF1. Nevertheless, as Looseley underlines, 'apart from the privatising of TF1, the new government declined to dismantle the Socialists' earlier achievements, for the simple reason that in the main they were already liberal.'⁴³ The stronger presence of the private sector in the PAF and the difficulties of the film industry led to the largest protest movement in the film trade, and the cultural world at large, since the Blum-Byrnes agreements.⁴⁴ In 1986, the Communist mayor of Aubervilliers, Jack Ralite, launched an appeal for the protection of French culture against private interests and set up the *États généraux de la culture* (Estates General of Culture, EGCu).⁴⁵ After a first meeting in February 1987 and within ten months, the EGCu were able to gather 6000 people for the ratification of the EGCu's Declaration and Bill of Cultural Rights on 16 November 1987 which had been adopted on 17 June 1987 by 1500 people.⁴⁶ Born out of the audiovisual personnel's indignation at the privatisation of TF1 and the creation of La Cinq, the Declaration of Cultural Rights listed a number of principles which should govern a nation's relationship to its Culture.⁴⁷ Its philosophy first and foremost was

significant in terms of quality: one would be hard put to give the titles of ten Italian masterpieces from the 1980s, whereas there were scores in previous decades.

⁴² For instance in Lucien Marest, 'Pour que vive le cinéma', *L'Humanité*, 24 June 1995, p. 3. Another example is the regular reference to Anatole Dauman in articles on 'cultural exception' and independant cinema. Anatole Dauman was a very influential producer who severely attacked French audiovisual policy under Mitterrand, accusing the Socialists of having betrayed the film sector and Jack Lang of 'hatching a plot in spite of his anti-American posturing', in 'Sauver le film français et européen', personal document (courtesy of Claude Michel), Dauman would criticise the multiplex, Hollywood film empire and its French emissaries such as Luc Besson's *The Fifth Element*, advocating instead a pluralist film production, see Anatole Dauman, 'Histoire d'une colonisation', *Le Monde*, 19 April 1996, p. 12; *Lettre à Madame Catherine Trautmann*, 9 June 1997. Dauman is quoted by Christophe Adriani, 'Pour le cinéma français et le cinéma en France', *La Pensée*, n° 29, pp. 95-107. See appendice 12, pp. 382-83.

⁴³ Looseley, p. 203.

⁴⁴ The protest against Langlois' dismissal was more a political protest than an economic one, and May '68 protest was not limited to cultural circles.

⁴⁵ In order to avoid confusion with the EGC (the May '68 Estates General of Cinema), I will refer to the Estates General of Culture as EGCu)

⁴⁶ Looseley, p. 207.

⁴⁷ Zoë Lin and Jean-Pierre Léonardini, 'L'Odéon vibrant pour des États généraux de la culture offensifs', *L'Humanité*, 19 June 1996, pp. 16-17; see Jack Ralite (États généraux de la culture), *La Culture française se*

the complete separation of culture from the economic world: 'A people who lets the business world dominate its imaginative cultural life condemns itself to freedoms which are precarious'.⁴⁸ In order for a nation to have a strong imaginative cultural life, the State must look after and cater for the country's creative freedom and its pluralism: 'We claim that no nation attached to its cultural values can revive its past or shape its future without the constant discoveries of artistic creation without the freedom to engage in confrontation, without the willingness to make of them the common good of the artists and their people. To the grey uniformity of commercial ambitions, we oppose a rainbow of sensitivity and intelligence and a multi-faceted opening of culture to the people of the whole world.'⁴⁹ The EGCu's Bill of Cultural Rights, which is not designed for the sole benefit of audiovisual production, but also for the fields of theatre, dance, music, song, circus, plastic arts, graphism, architecture and photography, can and must arouse a **public and national sense of responsibility** towards culture', which would be 'a new concept in Europe'.⁵⁰ The EGCu's set of principles and demands still constitute the core of the current French Communist stance on cultural and film matters. The EGCu celebrated their tenth anniversary in 1997 and are very much alive today. Indeed many of the ideas which were voiced in 1987 have gained momentum and are regularly heard at present, not least the fundamental opposition to the principles of economic liberalism which presides over the Declaration of Cultural Rights. I shall look at the evolution of the EGCu, the way they have influenced the struggle of the French film industry in the past ten years. While this section will confirm the PCF's concern at the well-being and future of the French film trade as well as reveal a significant evolution of the Party's viewpoint, it will also call into question the PCF's place in, and influence on, the national film sector.

porte bien à condition qu'on la sauve (Paris: Messidor/Éditions sociales, 1987), pp. 15-16, 45-61, 109-128 and 149-161.

⁴⁸ See appendice 10, pp. 374-76.

⁴⁹ Ibid., pp. 374-76.

⁵⁰ Ibid., pp. 374-76.

7.3. Down With Economic Liberalism!

Since 1987, there have been plenty of opportunities for the EGCu and their followers to express their fear at the possible harmful effect of a liberal economy on the French film industry.⁵¹ The globalisation process which has dominated the world economy for a number of years has led to many international negotiations, both among European nations and among world nations at large. In view of the previous battles fought by the French film industry, one could expect an acute alertness on the film professionals' part towards these negotiations. As shall be examined now, the mobilisation of the film personnel was as effective as ever during the 1993 GATT negotiations and the 1998 MAI negotiations. Moreover the European Union framework has become more and more central to the discussions on film-related matters.

7.3.1. The French, the Film Professionals, the EGCu and GATT

European film policy and the *Télévision sans frontières* directive in particular turned out to be the first major cause of protest led by the EGCu. Following the signing of the Single European Act, the *Télévision sans frontières* directive was an attempt to establish a 60 per cent quota of European productions on all member-states' TV channels. This protective measure, which was supported by the French government was emptied of any substance when, due to American pressure, the directive did not make the quota mandatory, but simply to be enforced 'whenever possible'. This (Socialist) government back-down triggered a wave of protest from the EGCu, which, alongside the *Comité d'action pour l'Europe et du cinéma et de la télévision* organised a protest rally in Strasbourg on 21 May 1989.⁵² Following the '*Télévision sans frontières*' fiasco, the EGCu and the film industry were on their guard. In addition both the French government, and President François Mitterrand were also anxious to wash away the humiliation of having had to give in to the Americans. The

⁵¹ The term 'liberal' will be used here in its economic sense, not its Left-wing political one.

⁵² Looseley, pp. 207-08.

Uruguay Round of negotiations on trade in services (the final stage of the GATT talks) would soon give an opportunity for all to flex their muscles.

Most accounts of these commercial talks underscore the part played by the French and highlight the allegedly united political front they showed in order to achieve their goal, i.e. the recognition of ‘cultural exception’ (*l’exception culturelle*).⁵³ “‘Cultural exception’ was the idea that films and audiovisual material — because of their “cultural specificity” to a particular nation — should not be governed by the same terms applied to foodstuffs, minerals, cars, etc.’⁵⁴ After a long stand-off, the negotiators eventually agreed to disagree and excluded film and audiovisual material from the final agreement. While it is true that at face value the French film sector and the French political sphere seem to have enjoyed a rare harmony, a closer look reveals a different, less ecumenical picture which most commentators failed to see.

An article written for *La Pensée* by Communist Christophe Adriani before the talks ended offers an instance of the difference of perspectives over the GATT issue. Adriani gives *two* chronologies of the ‘cultural exception’ saga. The first one begins on 11 March 1993 with Jack Valenti declaring that ‘culture will not be excluded from the revision of the GATT’, mentions Socialist Jack Lang’s and RPR Jacques Toubon’s community of mind on the subject in Venice on 6 October, and ends on 18 October with Prime Minister Édouard Balladur consulting with different film professionals. The second chronology lists the

⁵³ ‘When, for example, French (and European) directors fought to be excluded from the GATT agreement on the grounds that film is a cultural product rather than an industrial one, they received almost unanimous support from across the French political spectrum’, Wendy Everett, ‘Framing the fingerprints: a brief survey of European film’, in *European Identity in Cinema*, ed. by Wendy Everett (Exeter: Intellect Books, 1996), p. 18; ‘The domestic experience of the 1980s undoubtedly lies behind the French government’s unswerving promotion of European film production and inspired its successful demand that audio-visual products should not be included in the GATT free trade agreements concluded in 1993’, *French Cultural Studies*, pp. 234-35; France was a prime mover in the promotion of what is known as the “European audio-visual space”, in the creation of development funds for film production within the European Community, in insisting on the establishment of quotas for the screening of E.C.-generated material on television, and in insuring that “audio-visual products” were exempted from the GATT round of free-trade agreements in 1993’, *ibid.*, pp. 260-61. Subsequently, in 1993, debate about such “protectionism” became international again as the GATT negotiations brought further conflict with the US over France’s insistence on treating culture as an exception where free trade is concerned. Lang’s successor Jacques Toubon and Prime Minister Balladur now took up the torch of his resistance to American market domination in the closing stages of the seven-year long “Uruguay round”, which finally had to be concluded without an agreement on the audiovisual issue being reached’, Looseley, p. 206.

⁵⁴ *Encyclopedia of European Cinema*, p. 133.

successive initiatives taken by Ralite and the EGCu to alert and rally the film and audiovisual personnel against the danger of the GATT. It begins on 25 July 1992 with Ralite urging his listeners to be vigilant towards the GATT, and ends on a meeting organised by the EGCu outside the Pompidou Centre on 27 November 1993. Between these two dates, a number of demonstrations, film trade-unionists' meetings with Ministers, and other marks of mobilisation such as open letters and petitions, took place.⁵⁵ Clearly, Adriani opposes the EGCu's, the film personnel's and the PCF's campaign for the 'cultural exception' to the government's attitude. Indeed there were two contradictory standpoints regarding 'cultural exception'. The exclusion of film and audiovisual material from a global trade agreement was in perfect accordance with the Declaration of Cultural Rights. It was therefore logically supported by the EGCu and the PCF. Could a right-wing government, whose audiovisual policy had led to the creation of the EGCu, defend 'cultural exception' on the same ground? It could not, and more importantly it did not. The government fought the battle on economic, not cultural grounds. As far as they were concerned, the Americans read 'cultural exception' as a protectionist measure dressed up in a cultural cloak: 'The European Union, our most important market, is leaving American cinema no hope... Money is what really mattered, and with what cupidity!'⁵⁶ An assessment of the GATT talks by the United Nations also underscores the economic dimension of the audiovisual issue, placing it within the wider framework of the rapidly changing global telecommunications market.⁵⁷ It acknowledges France's particular position in Europe in terms of film subsidies.⁵⁸ Moreover, recognising both the dominant place of the United States and its appetite regarding the European market,

⁵⁵ Christophe Adriani, 'Pour le cinéma français et le cinéma en France', *La Pensée*, n° 29, pp. 104-05.

⁵⁶ Armand Mattelard, *Hollywood and the World, la longue histoire de l' "exception culturelle"*, personal document, p. 16 (courtesy Ginette Vincendeau).

⁵⁷ See appendix , pp. 377-81.

⁵⁸ 'The specific trade barriers most at issue were film subsidies and television quotas. Film production subsidies, which are nearly ubiquitous, have existed for decades and vary from country to country. France has the most substantial programme, levying an 11 per cent duty on box office sales which is funneled directly into film production support overseen by a national commission. (Revenues are also obtained by special taxes on video sales and rentals.) This system is widely credited with maintaining the viability of the French film industry, the most robust in Europe, which produces some 150 films annually, indeed, a larger number of films per capita than the United States.' *The Outcome of the Uruguay Round: An Initial Assessment. Supporting Papers to the Trade and Development Report, 1994* (New York: United Nations, 1994), Box 16, pp. 162-64, see appendice 11, pp. 377-381.

the report recognises the difficulties which countries are faced with regarding the strength of the Americans in terms of new information technologies: 'the revenues generated by new entertainment services could become a kind of general tax to finance the construction of a wholly new industrial infrastructure. Under the circumstances, it is easy to understand why no country would wish to surrender control of this sector to foreign competition without at least having a better perception of what role it might play in the more general economic future.'⁵⁹

Once more, the conflicting facets of cinema are brought into play. The EGCu welcomed 'cultural exception', because by endorsing its views on the specificity of culture, and by protecting the systems of aid in place in Europe, which as Michel Ciment explained, an American interpretation of GATT could decide illegal, it echoed the ideas present in its Declaration of Cultural Rights.⁶⁰ Yet the view that the French government was so active because it wanted to preserve measures such as the duty on box office sales which 'is used to subsidise innovative films, art-house cinemas, independent distributor, film festivals, film schools and East European and African production' was not shared by all in France.⁶¹ Interestingly, the first who voiced their concern at the apparent political community of mind over 'cultural exception' come from a far left background. Thus Jean-Louis Comolli warned of 'the danger of a polarisation against Hollywood which would deter many from seeing that the problem is not one of nations but quintessentially an economic one. The French industry is itself divided between Hollywood-like producers and more independently-minded

⁵⁹ 'The United States dominates world trade in audiovisual services, as far as media products such as films, television programmes and video productions are concerned, with an estimated 40 per cent of the market. However, the fastest growing market is the European Community, which has been estimated at ECU 23 billion and is expected to double by the year 2000. [...] An export cartel, Motion Picture Export Association of America (MPEAA), comprising 20th Century Fox, Columbia Tristar, Disney (Buena Vista), Paramount, Warner Bros., MCA Universal, Orion and MGM/UA is now present in 50 countries of the world. These firms also control the distribution of their films and aim at doing away with intermediaries in foreign markets. Importing countries have to face up to the market power of the MPEAA', *ibid.* On American audiovisual lobbying, see Yves Mamou, 'Sous la pression des États-Unis, la Commission européenne pourrait abolir la directive sur les quotas de diffusion', *Le Monde*, 29 December 1994; Yves Mamou, 'Washington fuit les enjeux culturels', *Le Monde*, 16 June 1995; Emmanuel Schwartzberg, 'La victoire provisoire de Brittan', *Le Figaro*, 10 January 1995; P de G, 'Martin Bangemann plaide pour un abandon des quotas', *Les Échos*, 1 February 1995; Yves Mouri, 'Menace sur les quotas audiovisuels', *Le Monde*, 19 June 1996 (courtesy Claude Michel).

⁶⁰ Michel Ciment, quoted in *Encyclopedia of European Cinema*, p. 133.

⁶¹ See for instance, *Encyclopedia of European Cinema*, p. 133.

producers.’ For Comolli, ‘to wage this struggle with nationally-based arguments is a rear-guard battle.’⁶² The director Marcel Hanoun shared the same view:

‘Cultural exception’ is a smoke screen. It is only a commercial struggle to determine who will ultimately control the industry. It has nothing to do with film culture, film independence or the will to innovate and search for new forms. The vociferous advocates of cultural exception cannot tolerate otherness, or difference here in France on their home ground. A tacit mafia-like complicity unites producers, distributors, advertisers and the media in order to silence anyone who does not enter the mould of a populist mediacracy... The “crusaders” of cultural exception have a spectacular ability to call attention to an almost mythical image of a “faraway evil enemy”, even though they are *themselves* its keenest admirers and most incorrigible imitators.⁶³

In Serge Toubiana’s words, ‘Culture no longer seems to be a factor of ideological division in view of Chirac’s or Jospin’s agreement on the defence of ‘cultural exception’. The government is locked into the defence of quotas and the denunciation of American hegemony.’⁶⁴ Also in *Cahiers du cinéma*, Pierre Hodgson echoed Comolli and Hanoun’s argument that the fight for independence was not only an international one but very much a national one too. Hodgson gives two examples of French film professionals expressing views which would run contrary to the defence of an independent cinema. Toscan du Plantier, director of Unifrance — the office which promotes French cinema abroad, declared in an interview with *Le Figaro* (26 December 1994) that the self-proclaimed power of the artist was disproportionate.⁶⁵ During a press conference on 25 January 1995, Dominique Wallon, director of the CNC, assessed that the future of film was above all an industrial one.⁶⁶ For Hodgson: ‘What the government wants therefore is a return to the *tradition de qualité*’, which in *Cahiers*’s jargon, means the production of well-made big-budget and ultimately ‘harmless’ films and the marginalisation of the auteur/independent film sector,

⁶² Jean-Claude Keutsch, ‘Interview with Jean-Louis Comolli: “Le cinéma français fait aussi des morts”’, *L’Hebdo de l’actualité sociale, Vie Ouvrière*, n° 2562/1, pp. 44-46.

⁶³ Marcel Hanoun in *Libération* 6 March 1995, quoted in Mattelard, p. 13.

⁶⁴ Serge Toubiana, ‘En panne de cinéma’, *Cahiers du cinéma*, n° 491, May 1995, pp. 56-57. See Lionel Jospin, ‘Gagner la bataille culturelle’, *Libération*, 4 April 1995, p. 4. Toubiana underlines that Chirac’s cultural slogan during his presidential campaign, ‘Culture for everyone’ (*Culture pour tous*) was similar to the PCF’s at Argenteuil in 1966.

⁶⁵ Pierre Hodgson, ‘Pleurnicherie pour le cinéma français’, *Cahiers du cinéma*, n° 489, April 1995, pp. 44-45.

⁶⁶ *Ibid.*

deemed not profitable enough.⁶⁷ Hodgson compares the government stance on the film industry with its attitude to other sectors, such as the French airline Air France, questioning the State's effectiveness regarding the welfare of the industry as it seems to be dealing with the issue according to political criteria which go back thirty or fifty years'.⁶⁸ While Hodgson does not take for granted the validity of public intervention on the film industry, Toubiana argues that the State should rethink the relationship between independent low-budget production and mainstream industrial production as well as start thinking about the issue with the broader European picture in mind.⁶⁹

This discussion highlights the conflicting points of view regarding 'cultural exception'. The PCF support's for the EGCu was unflinching throughout the GATT talks, and continued when the *Télévision sans frontières* directive was being revised. There is little doubt though that the Communist position has also been determined by economic considerations. Lucien Marest, a Communist leader who keeps a close eye on audiovisual issues, compares the government's position on the film industry with its position regarding companies such as Bull and France Télécom, which, Marest argues, the government wants to sell off. The PCF questions both the sincerity of the government's pro-'cultural exception' stance and the belief of "European technocrats", which resembles the American view, that regulations on audiovisual matters are now illusory and obsolete in view of the technological inevitability of multimedia'.⁷⁰ Instead, Marest contends, 'France and Europe have the means and the ability to both develop their audiovisual production and to invest massively in software production.

⁶⁷ Hodgson, pp. 44-47. Toscan du Plantier's views were echoed among certain critics, such as *Le Monde's* Jacques Siclier who criticised the 'megalomaniac' auteurs and advocated a reduction in the number of French films, see Anne Andreu, 'Interview with Jacques Siclier: "Le cinéma n'a plus rien à inventer"', *L'Événement du jeudi*, 8 November 1990, and Alfred Eibel, 'Interview with Jacques Siclier: "Les mégalos n'apportent rien au cinéma"', *Le Quotidien de Paris*, 13 November 1991. A similar criticism of the alleged negative economic consequences of auteur policy can be found in David Puttnam, *The Undeclared War. The Struggle for Control of the World's Film Industry* (London: HarperCollins, 1997), in particular in the chapter "Films are made for one or maybe two people", pp. 291-303.

⁶⁸ Hodgson, pp. 44-47.

⁶⁹ Toubiana, p. 57.

⁷⁰ Lucien Marest, 'La droite et l'exception culturelle', *L'Humanité*, 4 January 1995, p. 18. Marest quotes Yves Thibault de Silguy, Balladur's adviser and European commissioner, who declared that 'the government did not know how to stop the film professionals' protest movement' and that 'the battle was a lost cause'.

French and European authorities ought to face American and Japanese competition by resisting economic liberalism and rampant industry privatisation.’⁷¹

7.3.2. *L’AMI* (Multilateral Agreement on Investment, MAI): No Surrender!

While the European dimension of the cause is underlined, France’s economic and ideological independence remains central to the PCF’s argument. This issue came back with a vengeance only five years after the GATT talks. The prospect of an international agreement endangering French and European audiovisual industries was raising its ugly head again. Once more it was Ralite who, at a meeting of the Estates General of Culture, first alerted the film sector to the dangers likely to be incurred if this new international arrangement ever came into effect.

On 17 June 1996, the EGCu gathered in the Odéon Theatre. In his speech, the main theme of which was summed up by the motto ‘we are not complaining, we are lodging a complaint’, Ralite evoked the shortcomings of the government and of Europe in terms of their audiovisual policies, the disastrous cultural policies of National Front-run towns and increasing American domination. In addition, he mentioned that discussions on an international agreement on investments (Multilateral Agreement on Investments) were taking place within the framework of the OECD. This agreement, he claimed, would endanger the ‘cultural exception’ won during the GATT talks.⁷² This warning was not immediately followed by a protest movement. It is only in December 1997, that the campaign against MAI really took off. The PCF wholeheartedly participated in the protest movement, its leader calling on the Prime Minister not to sign the Agreement.⁷³ *L’Humanité* was indeed the only French daily to report the different initiatives of the anti-MAI lobby on a regular basis.⁷⁴ For

⁷¹ Ibid

⁷² Zoë Lin and Jean-Pierre Léonardini, ‘L’Odéon vibrant pour des États généraux de la culture offensifs’, *L’Humanité*, 19 June 1996, pp. 16-17.

⁷³ Robert Hue, ‘Letter to the Prime Minister’, *L’Humanité*, 12 February 1998.

⁷⁴ Dominique Widemann, ‘Aides à la production et droit d’auteur en ligne de mire’, *L’Humanité*, 22 October 1997, p. 21; Dominique Bari, ‘Les mauvais coups de l’AMI’, *ibid.*, 5 December 1997; *ibid.* 13 December 1997; Michel Muller, ‘Marchés financiers sans frontières’, *ibid.*, 15 Décembre 1997; Lionel Alion and Pierre Levy, ‘Report on a round table’, *ibid.*; Michel Muller, ‘Interview with Lori Wallach: “AMI: attention, traité

the PCF, the MAI epitomised the evils of globalisation. Discussed in secret since January 1995 by the twenty-nine wealthiest nations in the World, the agreement would guarantee free investment in every part of the world as well as give precedence to investors over national governments, therefore 'giving the investors all the rights and leave national governments with all the responsibilities'.⁷⁵ The great danger of course is the fact that this freedom of capital circulation would undermine the sovereignty and decision-making powers of individual States and their democratic institutions. For the EGCu, and the French audiovisual professionals, the MAI would almost inevitably mean the end of all protective systems of aid in place in Europe. These would be made useless as they would be opened to everyone.⁷⁶ Bertrand Tavernier explained in simple words what would happen if the MAI were to be implemented: 'If, for example, the French gave aid to an African film director, Steven Spielberg could say: "You gave money to a Malian director, so you have to give me money too".'⁷⁷ Moreover the *droits d'auteur* risked being replaced by the American 'copyright' system. The stage director André Benedetto explains very clearly the difference between the two: 'Copyright is a bit like owning a painting. You buy it and it's yours forever. The *droits d'auteur* (the author's proprietorial rights) work according to a very different principle. From

dangereux!'", *ibid.*, 2 February 1998; Michel Muller, 'AMI: le gouvernement interpellé', *ibid.*, 3 February 1998; Michel Muller, 'Interview with Nuti Albala: "Cet AMI intime des multinationales"', *ibid.*, 9 February 1998; 'Jack Lang dénonce l'AMI', *ibid.*, 10 February 1998, p. 16; Pierre Zarka: 'La World Company', *ibid.*, 12 February 1998; 'Cet AMI qui vous veut du mal', *ibid.*; Jean Roy, 'Levée de boucliers massive contre l'AMI', *ibid.*; Pierre Barbancey, 'Interview with Jean-Pierre Page: "L'AMI ne s'attaque pas qu'à l'exception culturelle"', *ibid.*, 16 February 1998, p. 10; Jean-Pierre Léonardini, 'L'AMI avec qui on ne sait trop sur quel pied danser', *ibid.*; Jean-Pierre Léonardini, 'Hier à l'Odéon: un ministre, la culture et le reste qui pèse très lourd', *ibid.*, 17 February 1998, p. 3; Jean-Paul Monferran, 'Interview with Antoine Casanova: "L'odieuse nouvel esprit des lois"', *ibid.*, 17 February 1998, p. 5; Émilie Rive, 'Interview with Agnès Bertrand (Secretary-general of Ecoropa and delegate general of the Observatory of Globalization): "Les assemblées seraient dépouillées de leurs prérogatives"', *ibid.*, 19 February 1998, p. 13; Pierre Levy, 'Interview with Jordi Ribo (member of the executive board of the Workers Committee of Catalogna: "L'AMI, comme l'euro contre les populations"', *Ibid.*, 19 February 1998, p. 13; 'Semaine nationale et internationale d'action contre l'AMI', *Ibid.*, 21 September 1998; 'Semaine d'action et initiatives', *ibid.*, 23 September 1998; 'Face à l'AMI, un forum démocratique', *ibid.*, 23 September 1998; Cécile Besson, 'L'Amérique du Nord, laboratoire de l'AMI', *ibid.*, 8 October 1998. Significantly *Libération's* coverage of the anti-AMI campaign was somewhat limited. The first significant article by Jacqueline Coignard bore the ironic title 'Le retour de la grande méchante mondialisation', *Libération*, 12 February 1998, pp. 20-21. It made the main news four days later with Jacqueline Coignard and P. S., 'L'accord libéral sur l'investissement est mal parti', *ibid.*, 16 February 1998, pp. 2-4. Has this got to do with *Libération's* rather liberal financial godfathers?

⁷⁵ Platform of ATTAC, International Movement for Democratic Control of Financial Markets and their Institutions, 11-12 December, 1998, see appendice 13, pp. 384-86.

⁷⁶ 'Quand le cinéma alerte sur un danger de civilisation', *L'Humanité*, 5 February 1998.

⁷⁷ Peter Lennon, 'A man of action', (*Guardian News Services*), *The Irish Times*, 31 July 1999, weekend supplement, p. 5.

the outset the notion of *droits d'auteur* contains an idea of national wealth which copyright can never do. For seventy years after the author's death the legal claimants are entitled to royalties. The work then falls into the public domain.⁷⁸

Very soon, the battle against the MAI reached the same proportions as the one for 'cultural exception' of which it was in fact, and in every respect, the continuation. By February 1998, the French film sector was fully involved in the campaign.⁷⁹ During the 1998 *Nuit des Césars*, the French Academy Awards, the MAI negotiations were publicly condemned by Brigitte Fossey, Maurice Bernard, Robert Guédiguian and Pierre Tchernia, an interesting combination of generations, expertise and styles, which was also symptomatic of the extent of the trade's mobilisation.⁸⁰ Yet, in spite of its similarities with the previous protest movement, the campaign against the MAI was very different indeed. Taking place for the most part under a Rainbow coalition left-wing government, the battle against the MAI was fought along anti-liberal lines. Many non-Communist organisations joined in the campaign which very quickly reached the international stage. The US-based association Public Citizen Global Watch animated by the American lawyer Lori M. Wallach, along with the San Francisco/Malaysian-based Third World International Network Forum on Globalisation led by Martin Khor became very engaged in the campaign. In France, *L'Observatoire de la mondialisation* was also very active and organised a meeting in the National Assembly on 4 December 1997 at which Jack Lang, Jack Ralite, and Green deputy Noël Mamère were present.⁸¹ *Le Monde diplomatique* became another fervent campaigner against the MAI.⁸²

⁷⁸ André Benedetto, 'Mémento de campagne', *L'Humanité*, 31 May 1999.

⁷⁹ 'Le cinéma contre l'AMI', *L'Humanité*, 4 February 1998; Didier Rochet, 'Interview with Jack Ralite: "Dans le monde de la culture, l'inquiétude grandit"', *L'Humanité Hebdo*, n° 12, 5-11 February 1998, p. 50; Dominique Cabrera (director), 'La notion de citoyenneté privée de sens', *ibid.*, 12 February 1998; Michelle Levieux, 'Catherine Deneuve parle d'or', *ibid.*, 20 February 1998, p. 21; Jean-Jacques Mitterrand, 'Après le GATT, l'AMI... et ensuite?', *Zéro de conduite*, n° 29, First semester 1998, pp. 2-3; 'Pour en finir avec l'AMI', *La Lettre de la SRF*, n° 61, September 1998, p. 2;

⁸⁰ Jean Roy, 'Et le gagnant est... On connaît la chanson', *L'Humanité*, 2 March 1998.

⁸¹ *L'Observatoire de la mondialisation* published a small book on the MAI in September 1998, *Lumière sur l'AMI: le test de Dracula*, Observatoire de la mondialisation (Paris: L'Esprit frappeur, n° 31, 1998). The book was advertised in *L'Humanité*, 'Le test de Dracula', 23 September 1998.

⁸² See Lori M. Wallach, 'Élaboré au sein de l'OCDE à l'insu des citoyens, le nouveau manifeste du capitalisme mondial', *Le Monde diplomatique*, n° 527, February 1998, p. 22; Jack Ralite, 'Vers un droit d'auteur sans auteurs', *ibid.*, March 1998, n° 528, p. 5; Jean-Paul Monferran, interview with Bernard Cassen, director of *Le Monde diplomatique*, 'Il ne faut pas d'AMI du tout', *L'Humanité*, 17 February 1998, p. 5;

The campaign had a strong left-wing flavour. In comparison with the movement for 'cultural exception' which was confined to the audiovisual sector, this one had much wider political and social implications allowing the PCF to turn it into a public hobby horse. When Jospin announced that France would not attend the talks which were to resume in October 1998,⁸³ *L'Humanité's* headlines of 15 October 1998 read 'A fine victory' and for Robert Hue, the Prime Minister's decision to leave the talks was 'one of the major ones ever taken by the *gauche plurielle*'.⁸⁴ *Libération* spoke of Jospin's decision as a way to preserve his political majority.⁸⁵ Contrary to their attitude during the GATT talks, right-wing politicians stayed very discreet during the MAI discussion. It was only after the decision to take France out of the talks, that some ventured an opinion. While President Chirac did not make public whether or not he agreed with his Prime Minister's decision, Patrick Devedjian (RPR) declared that Europe was following its own way and had its own conception of culture', but ultra-Liberal Alain Madelin (*Force Libérale*) regretted that the decision had been taken to please the Greens and the Communists.⁸⁶ The anti-liberal French Left can be sure to keep a close eye on future international commercial talks, thanks to the network of associations which have come together in the aftermath of the MAI talks.⁸⁷ Only a few days after France withdrew from the talks an international meeting against the MAI took place at the Cartoucherie de Vincennes, with among others, Lory M. Wallach, Martin Kohr and Jack Ralite.⁸⁸ In December 1998, the platform of the international movement ATTAC (International movement for democratic control of financial markets and their institutions) was adopted. Although not founded by the PCF, but following an article by *Le Monde diplomatique's* Ignatio Ramonet, ATTAC echoes very closely the PCF's view on globalisation: 'Financial globalization increases economic insecurity and social inequalities. It bypasses and

⁸³ 'Lionel Jospin: pas d'abandon de souveraineté à des intérêts privés', *L'Humanité*, 15 October 1998.

⁸⁴ Michel Mullet, 'AMI: le gouvernement a dit non', *ibid*; Charles Silvestre: 'Vous avez dit mondialisme', *ibid*.

⁸⁵ The Greens were also very hostile to the MAI, Jack Lang had condemned the MAI (*L'Humanité*, 10 February 1998) and Minister for Culture Catherine Trautman had expressed her concern (*ibid.*, 17 February 1998). Pascal Riché, 'Jospin: Adieu l'AMI, salut les copains', *Libération*, 15 October 1998, p. 22.

⁸⁶ *Ibid*.

⁸⁷ Ironically, there is a kind of competition between these different associations, the EGCu and the PCF as to who first brought MAI to attention.

⁸⁸ Joël Lumien, 'Sommet citoyen international contre l'AMI', *L'Humanité*, 19 October 1998.

undermines popular decision-making, democratic institutions, and sovereign states responsible for the general interest. In their place, it substitutes a purely speculative logic that expresses nothing more than the interests of multinational corporations and financial markets [...] At the same time the USA as well as the European Commission continue their free trade crusade, pushing for the creation of new zones of deregulation at the continental or intercontinental level (the PET project between Europe and North America, the extension of NAFTA into Latin America, etc.)'.⁸⁹ Significantly the ATTAC website is also accessible through the PCF's.

7.3.3. After MAI, from BLIC to BLOC: Long live Independent Cinema!

While the left-wing rainbow coalition rejoiced at the government's decision, the French film personnel was also relieved. ARP, *Betty Blue*'s director Jean-Jacques Beinex, EGCu's Jack Ralite, and UPF's Clara Meriaux-Delbarre, all expressed their satisfaction, with the latter stressing that their campaign had gone beyond the mere defence of the film sector's interest but was a philosophical one about the role and place of the citizens in one's country.⁹⁰ But the film industry did not oppose a united front against the MAI. A few months before it ended, the battle against MAI had provoked a split within the *Bureau de liaison des industries cinématographiques* (BLIC), an umbrella trade organisation which regroups a variety of film industry's unions and bodies. In March 1998, The UPF left BLIC because it refused to condemn MAI.⁹¹ In the aftermath of the 1998 Cannes Film Festival, the '*Bureau de liaison des organisations du cinéma*' (BLOC) was set up to defend the interests of the independent film sector: 'the battle against the MAI has been the basis for a new alliance of the independent sector's organisations'.⁹² The BLOC's mission is to guarantee

⁸⁹ See appendice 13, pp. 384-86.

⁹⁰ *L'Humanité*, 15 October 1998.

⁹¹ Ange-Dominique Bouzet, 'Querelle entre les ennemis de l'AMI', *Libération*, 7 & 8 March 1998, p. 33.

⁹² 'Éditorial', *La Lettre de la SRF*, n° 62, October 1998, p. 1. The different branches of the industry are represented: SRF, Société des Réalisateurs de Films; UPF, Union des Producteurs de Films, ACID; Agence pour le Cinéma Indépendant dans sa Diffusion; SDI, Syndicat des Distributeurs Indépendants; AFCAE: Association Française des Cinémas d'Art et Essai; SNTR: Syndicat National des Techniciens et Réalisateurs; SNA, Syndicat National des Acteurs.

cinema's freedom of creation, independence and diversity.⁹³ A major aspect of the BLOC's viewpoint is that 'the creation of a strong industrial sector is not enough to ensure the vitality of the film industry, nor is it enough to fulfil the audiovisual sector's requirement for films.'⁹⁴

Obviously, the PCF was bound to welcome an organisation which both advocates an extensive pluralist film production and condemns industrial concentration in a situation where 'the big American majors are now safely rooted in the French film market thanks to their agreements with large financial groups (Twentieth Century Fox with UGC, which belongs to the *Compagnie Générale des Eaux* and Walt Disney; Buena Vista with Gaumont which belongs to the Seydoux group'.⁹⁵

The BLOC's charter and the EGCu's Declaration of Cultural Rights share many views, although the BLOC does not put its demands directly to the French authorities, but simply asked to be recognised as the representative of the independent sector.⁹⁶ That the PCF should embrace the cause of independent cinema is not in itself a surprise. Since the Liberation, the Party has often expressed its belief that a high production level is essential to the good health of the film industry.⁹⁷ This in itself does not mean the defence of independent cinema. But from the late 1960s, the fact that film professionals who uphold the view that French cinema ought to reduce its film production, often blame auteur cinema into the bargain did not go unnoticed by the Communists.⁹⁸ In the early 1970s, film producer Jean-Charles Edeline, who wished for 'films which would not fall into a kind of intellectual and backward-looking

⁹³ BLOC document, p. 2. (courtesy of Claude Michel). See appendice 14, pp. 387-391.

⁹⁴ Ibid., p. 4.

⁹⁵ Jean-Max Causse and Jean-Marie Rodon/Cinémas Action: *La Fête des cinémas indépendants... jusqu'à quand?*, leaflet.

⁹⁶ BLOC document, p. 5. At an international level, the advocates of 'cultural exception' were not always welcomed. During a conference on European cinema organised by the British Screen Advisory Council (BSAC) in Birmingham in April 1998, Claude Miller, Bertrand Tavernier, Robert Guédiguian were crossed off the list of delegates put forward by the French authorities, while Rupert Murdoch and Hollywood representatives were admitted to the conference, in Ange-Dominique Bouzet, 'L'Europe audiovisuelle au travail', *Libération*, 6 April 1998, p. 39.

⁹⁷ See chapters 1, 3 & 5, or Serge Rémy, 'Concentration financière et baisse de la production', *L'Humanité*, 25 May 1995, p. 17.

⁹⁸ Nicolas Seydoux (*Président de la Fédération des Distributeurs de Films*, [BLIC]) claimed that many films do not have their place not only in his own cinema theatres, but in any other theatre, in 'Trente... et un an', *La Lettre de la SRF*, n° 66, May 1999, p. 1.

esotericism which is ostensibly avant-garde but which is in fact cut off from a popular art and which has no regard whatsoever for the public' was criticised by Communist film directors.⁹⁹ As seen above, Edeline's view was not uncommon in the early 1990s and would probably be shared by some today. Reduction of production and condemnation of independent cinema seem to have been going hand in hand. Obviously this could only benefit large French film companies, such as Gaumont and Pathé, and lead many independent film personnel to unemployment, be they producers, technicians, or artists. Over the past twenty years, the need to preserve an independent sector had been regularly acknowledged by Communist commentators and leaders. Thus in 1979, Cervoni argued that Rohmer's *Perceval le Gallois* was an example of the sort of film which 'must continue to exist'. Mentioning that the shooting of the film was marred by difficult working conditions, Cervoni called for a film policy which would insure that such films are made: 'French cinema must not be reduced to a choice between vulgar commercial commodities and makeshift marginal films'.¹⁰⁰ In 1981, Marchais advocated more public support to the independent film sector 'which is not sufficiently provided for given that it is an essential element of pluralism of film production'.¹⁰¹ When in December the PROCIREP withdrew its grant to ACID (*Agence du Cinéma Indépendant pour sa Diffusion*), a directors-led association whose aim is to promote the broadcasting of independent films, *L'Humanité* expressed its concern.¹⁰² This was followed by numerous articles and interviews related to the independent film sector.¹⁰³

⁹⁹ Collectif de cinéastes communistes, *Cinéma: Culture ou Profit* (Paris: La Nouvelle Critique, 1976), note 7, p. 11.

¹⁰⁰ Albert Cervoni, 'L'itinéraire de *Perceval* et celui d'Éric Rohmer', *France Nouvelle*, n° 1735, 12 February 1979, pp. 42-43.

¹⁰¹ Georges Marchais, 'A l'heure des satellites, la responsabilité publique n'a pas à s'évanouir', *Le Film français*, n° 1854, 17 April 1981, pp. 4-5.

¹⁰² 'Les réalisateurs défendent l'ACID. La PROCIREP vient de supprimer la subvention de 300 000 francs', *L'Humanité*, 19 December 1995.

¹⁰³ Gilles Le Morvan, "'Vive l'indépendance'", 18 villes de Seine-Saint-Denis réitèrent l'opération "Vive le cinéma français"', *L'Humanité Dimanche*, 1995; 'Le cinéma indépendant a besoin de votre soutien', *L'Humanité*, 27 April 1996; Michel Guilloux, 'Le République des indépendants se manifeste ce soir', *ibid.*, 6 May 1996, p. 21; 'A la rencontre des indépendants au cinéma Max Linder le 16 juin', *ibid.*, 25 May 1996, p. 16; Charles Sylvestre, 'Interview with Serge Le Péron: "Les indépendants sont une clé du cinéma français"', *ibid.*, 1 June 1996, p. 17; 'Projection en avant-première de *Walk the Walk*, de Robert Kramer. Débat: Les indépendants ont-ils gagné un nouveau public?', avec l'ACID et la SRF, *ibid.*, 6 June 1996, p. 28; Michel Guilloux, 'Interview with Roger Diamantis (director of legendary Parisian art-house cinema Saint André-des-Arts): "'Des salles sans spectateurs"', *ibid.*, 8 June 1996, p. 16; Jean Roy and Michel Guilloux, 'Interview

Since then and to the present day, the defence of independent cinema has been at the top of the Communist film agenda.

While the PCF had acknowledged the importance of a strong independent sector for many years already, the *Fédération du Spectacle* proved slower in its rallying to the independent film cause. It is therefore quite remarkable that the film technicians union joined the BLOC. A small, yet telling, example of the change in the relationship of the trade union movement and the independent film sector is the involvement in film of the *Caisse Centrale des Activités Sociales* (CCAS), the works council of the French electricity and gas workers, one of the biggest in France (EDF-GDF has a workforce of 6000). The CCAS has released under the aegis of the SRF, and with the ACID and the AFCAE, a film card to be used in independent cinemas.¹⁰⁴ More recently the CCAS has been supporting African cinema.¹⁰⁵

The defence of independent cinema and small-scale productions has permeated every avenue of the PCF's involvement in the film sector. The Party and the *Fédération du Spectacle* which have always kept a close eye on the social battles of the film industry's workforce, have given regular accounts of the latest and on-going acute social issue concerning the film industry.¹⁰⁶ The reappraisal of the calculation of unemployment benefit

with Antoine de Clermont-Tonnerre (independent producer): "On va vers une pensée unique du cinéma", 'Interview with Jean-Claude Guiguet (director): "Le cinéma, part de la vie communautaire"', 'Interview with Claude-Éric Poiroux (cinema-owner): "l'exploitant, meilleur allié du réalisateur"', *ibid.*, 15 June 1996, p. 15; Michel Guilloux and Jean-Pierre Léonardini, 'Le cinéma se renouvelle dans ses marges', *ibid.*, 17 June 1996, pp. 20-21; 'Où en êtes-vous avec l'indépendance' (interviews with Jean-Paul Civeyrac, who directed *Ni d'Ève ni d'Adam* and the producer Christine Van de Putte), *ibid.*, 7 May 1997, p. 25; 'Où en êtes-vous avec l'indépendance?' (interview with Jacques Atlan, producer and distributor of *art et essai* films), *ibid.*, 8 May 1997, p. 17.

¹⁰⁴ Michèle Soullignac, 'Quand les électriciens se branchent sur le cinéma indépendant', *La Lettre de la SRF*, n° 62, October 1998, p. 6.

¹⁰⁵ Didier Adès and Dominique Dambert, 'Interview with Pascal Lazare, vice-President of CCAS', in 'Entreprises: y a-t-il une vie après le marché', *Rue des Entrepreneurs*, France Inter, 14 August 1999, repeat of 1 May 1999.

¹⁰⁶ Michel Guilloux, 'Les intermittents s'offrent un spectacle', *L'Humanité*, 12 December 1996, p. 25; François Lancelot, 'Intermittents: quatre mois de sursis', *ibid.*, 20 December 1996, p. 24; François Lancelot, 'Les intermittents toujours mobilisés', *ibid.*, 23 January 1997, p. 24; 'Actions sans intermittence, sur les professionnels du spectacle', *ibid.*, 1 February 1997, p. 17; Zoë Lin, 'Les intermittents ne cèdent pas', *ibid.*, 5 February 1997, p. 20; 'Intermittents: opération péage gratuit', *ibid.*, 8 February 1997; 'Césars 97', *ibid.*, 10 February 1997, p. 22; Michel Guilloux, 'Ils crèvent l'écran pour vivre', Zoë Lin, 'Intermittents: tenir pour que le spectacle continue!', Zoë Lin, 'Toute la profession est partie prenante de ce conflit', 'Historique des actions', 'Des chômeurs à plein temps', 'Ce qu'a dit Mireille Rivat aux Victoires de la musique', *ibid.*, 12 February 1997; 'Les intermittents lèvent le camp à la Cité de la musique', *ibid.*, 15 February 1997, p. 16; Jean-Pierre Léonardini, 'Les syndicats ont aujourd'hui le rapport du médiateur', *ibid.*, 17 February 1997, p. 21; 'Intermittents première rencontre syndicats/patronat', *ibid.*, 21 February 1997, p. 22; Jean Roy, 'Et L'emploi dans tous ça', *ibid.*, 8 March 1999, p. 17. 'Intermittents : les coordinations se réunissent', *ibid.*, 15 April

for the '*intermittents du spectacle*', the contract workers of the entertainment industry, has sparked off an important movement protest among the *intermittents*, with the support of an important section of the film sector, not least the CGT, which is still by far the largest trade union in the film industry.¹⁰⁷ The *Fédération du Spectacle* was the only union which refused to sign the agreement on unemployment benefit with the MEDEF, the employers' union. Since 1967, under appendices 2 and 8 to the ASSEDIC scheme, film contract workers are granted unemployment benefit according to the fixed going professional rate independently of the amount they earned during their previous employment. For instance, a film editor who worked on a small-scale production and was paid under the going rate, would have nevertheless received unemployment benefit calculated on that going rate, whereas under a normal ASSEDIC scheme, his/her benefit would have been paid according to the amount actually earned. Under the advertised new scheme, film contract workers would no longer enjoy the benefits of appendices 2 and 8.¹⁰⁸ While for an outside observer, the existing system appears almost indecently advantageous, for the opponents of the changes its abandonment would force many out of the industry. On the one hand, for film personnel who are less paid when they participate in low-budget productions, experimental works or first films, the new unemployment scheme would inevitably mean a reduction of their income. On the other, well-paid film personnel, such as a renowned director of photography for instance, would continue to enjoy high unemployment benefit. This would eventually lead to a two-tier system: a film industry aristocracy (which in many ways already exists) and a film industry lumpenproletariat.

1997; 'Les intermittents du spectacle gagnent 21 mois de répit', *ibid.*, 17 April 1997. By comparison, *Libération*, which also covered the film contract-workers' industrial dispute extensively, opened its pages to the employers' viewpoint, see René Solis, 'Les intermittents mobilisés à plein temps', *Libération*, 11 December 1996, p. 30; Annick Peigne-Giuly, 'Intermittents, une nécessité patronale', *ibid.*, 20 February 1997, p. 36; Renaud Lecadre & Annick Peigne-Giuly, interview with Jean Gandois, 'Je ne suis pas un chasseur d'intermittents', *ibid.*, 18 April 1997, p. 29; François Devinat, 'Les intermittents à la rue', *ibid.*, 18 February 1999, p. 33; François Devinat, 'Les intermittents protestent en continu', *ibid.*, 13-14 March 1999, p. 35.

¹⁰⁷ 'We reject the 20 January agreement on film contract workers which endangers the resistance of French cinema', 'Principe de solidarité', *Libération*, 2 March 1999, p. 5; 'Pétition: les cinéastes ne chôment pas', *L'Humanité*, 4 March 1999.

¹⁰⁸ The ASSEDIC (*Association pour l'emploi dans l'industrie et le commerce*) is the organization which manages unemployment contributions and payments in France.

This possible drift was criticised by the PCF which saw it as imperilling the film industry's future: 'The agreement on unemployment benefits jeopardises the principle of equality, and would be detrimental to those who start in the trade, take new initiatives, those who take risks. The less well-off of us will be poorer, the better-off will get richer. Fewer films but with bigger budgets, fewer technicians but better paid. What future for French cinema?'¹⁰⁹ Through its deputies and its leadership, the PCF has publicly raised the question of the film contract workers in the National Assembly.¹¹⁰ Insisting on the benefits of the current system, Communist MP Daniel Paul underlined, in a written question to the Minister for Employment and Solidarity (Martine Aubry), that the application of the 21 January 1999 agreement would seriously curtail the production of first films.¹¹¹ Similarly, Communist MP George Hage mentions the difficulty small production companies would face in order to produce first-time auteurs if the system underwent the advertised changes.¹¹² Once again the considerable size of the industry's mobilisation against the reform of unemployment benefit has led the government to postpone the agreement reached on 20 January 1999 and confirm the renewal of the current system for the year 1999.¹¹³ Thirty years before, auteur cinema and the film industry's workforce's welfare were seen by the *Fédération du Spectacle* in oxymoronic terms.¹¹⁴ Today, the welfare of auteur cinema is considered as the guarantee of the welfare of the film sector as a whole.

Two other aspects of the French film industry which are a cause of public protest also relate to the independent sector versus French majors sector dichotomy. The development of mutliplexes in France is linked to the concentration taking place in the film industry. For the BLOC, 'the large French film groups, Gaumont and Pathé would be happy with many fewer films than are currently produced. All they need is enough films to feed the multiplexes they

¹⁰⁹ Michel Guilloux, 'Double menace sur les films indépendants', *L'Humanité*, 24 April 1999.

¹¹⁰ 'Cinéastes et techniciens en lutte rencontrent le PCF', *L'Humanité*, 11 March 1999, p. 24.

¹¹¹ PCF's internet site, 15 March 1999.

¹¹² 'Intervention de George Hage, député du Nord, Vice-président de la Commission des Affaires Etrangères', 9 March 1999; PCF's Internet site, 15 March 1999.

¹¹³ 'Lionel Jospin veut pérenniser le statut des intermittents', *L'Humanité*, 17 April 1999.

¹¹⁴ See Henri Back's point of view, chapter 5, p. 205.

are opening throughout the country.’¹¹⁵ This view is shared by the PCF which has repeatedly voiced its opposition to the multiplex.¹¹⁶ The other issue concerns Canal Plus. ‘French cinema rallies for and against Canal Plus’, this title of an article by Michel Guilloux illustrates the state of anxiety of French film personnel. On the one hand it is worried by talks of a rapprochement between Canal Plus and Rupert Murdoch’s BSkyB. For many in the trade Rupert Murdoch epitomises the dangers of a liberal audiovisual world, as Silvio Berlusconi had done a few years before. An agreement between the two TV companies could only exacerbate the industry’s social problems and might result in redundancies.¹¹⁷ It could also affect Canal Plus’s input into French film production. For the SRF and ARP a merger with BSkyB would be incompatible with a policy of pluralism in film production.¹¹⁸

Canal Plus has indeed become an essential player in French film production, investing about 800 million francs per year in French cinema. In 1997, Canal Plus participated in the financing of 134 French films, or French-initiated films, which represents 84 per cent of the year’s production. This is why, while expressing their concern at the station’s international policy, ‘140 directors came to the rescue of Canal Plus’, following a case lost by the subscription Channel to TPS (*Télévision par Satellite*).¹¹⁹ Since 19 December 1998, the *Conseil de la Concurrence*, the controlling body which supervises market competition, has condemned Canal Plus for abuse of a privileged position (*abus de position dominante*).¹²⁰

¹¹⁵ Jean-Henri Roger, ‘Ce qui est dit est dit’, *La Lettre de la SRF*, n° 66, May 1999, p. 4.

¹¹⁶ Jean-Pierre Léonardini, ‘Utopia contre Multiplex’, *L’Humanité*, 22 July 1994, p. 17; ‘Les cinémas d’art et Essai contre les multiplexes’, *ibid.*, 30 August 1994, p. 19; ‘Cent ans de cinéma et demain...’, Bruno Vincens, ‘La guerre du cinéma’, *ibid.*, 23 February 1995, p. 16; *L’Humanité Dimanche*, n° 273, 8-14 June 1995, pp. 30-37; Michel Guilloux, ‘Le cinéma pieds dans l’eau à Paris’, *L’Humanité*, 20 January 1997, p. 24; Michel Guilloux, ‘Réactions au projet de multiplexe Gaumont-Aquaboulevard’, *ibid.*, 23 January 1997, p. 24; ‘Multiplexes: un premier recul à Paris’, *ibid.*, 18 April 1997; Jean-Pierre Léonardini, ‘Le cinéma con mérite’, *ibid.*, 30 December 1998. See also, ‘Un Rex tué par un multiplex’, *Libération*, February 1997; Anatole Dauman, ‘Lettre à Madame Catherine Trautmann, Ministre de la Culture’, 9 June 1997; Hugues Baudoin, Jean-Michel Frodon, ‘1998: l’année américaine’, *Le Monde*, 30 décembre 1998. See appendice 12, pp. 382-83.

¹¹⁷ Jean Roy, ‘Et L’emploi dans tous ça’, *L’Humanité*, Monday 8 March 1999, p. 17.

¹¹⁸ SRF and ARP’s declaration about the negotiations between the two private stations, in Michel Guilloux, ‘Le cinéma français se mobilise pour et contre Canal Plus’, *L’Humanité*, 3 March 1999, p. 19.

¹¹⁹ TPS, presided by Éric Le Lay, is composed of TF1, France Télévision, M6 and France Telecom. Ange-Dominique Bouzet, ‘140 cinéastes au secours de Canal Plus’, *Libération*, 20-21 February 1999, p. 26. On 15 June Canal Plus lost its appeal against the decision, Erwan Higuinen, *Cahiers du cinéma*, n° 537, July-August 1999, p. 14.

¹²⁰ Ange-Dominique Bouzet, ‘140 cinéastes au secours de Canal Plus’, *Libération*, 20-21 February 1999, p. 26.

At stake is the chronology of a film's successive releases. Regulations are in place as to the lapse of time which must separate the release of a film in cinemas, on video, on pay TV stations, and regular TV channels. A lapse of time must be preserved between each release so that each different 'medium' has enough time to derive a profit from it. Until then Canal Plus enjoyed exclusive rights on certain pre-purchased films in return for its considerable contribution to the industry. It could therefore show films sooner than the other French stations. An agreement signed between the BLIC, ARP and TPS on 15 March 1999, would allow TPS to show some films three months before Canal Plus and, at a lower cost, show the film a second time directly in competition with Canal Plus. Given that at the present time TPS's involvement in French and European cinema is only between 75 and 220 million francs, i.e. much less than its competitor, the independent sector is worried that Canal Plus might not continue its involvement in film production if it cannot benefit from it.¹²¹ A small point needs to be made here regarding the ARP. As an association of directors-producers, it has supported the 'cultural exception', participated in the anti-MAI campaign and often expressed views on a par with the EGCu's or even the Communists': 'When we stop waging war to Hollywood, we will have lost the war. When I say we, I mean the Europeans, the independents, ARP, the SRF...' ¹²² But financially speaking, some of its members can be extremely powerful, more powerful than anybody in the BLOC.¹²³ The interests it represents are not necessarily similar to the BLOC's, as their signing with TPS illustrates.¹²⁴

On 15 April a new agreement between the BLOC and Canal Plus was signed. Its aim is to secure the continued involvement of Canal Plus in French cinema, in particular regarding

¹²¹ Michel Guilloux, 'Double menace sur les films indépendants', *L'Humanité*, 24 April 1999.

¹²² Guilloux, 'Interview with Claude Miller (president of ARP): "Le vrai cinéma dérange"', *L'Humanité*, 27 October 1997, p. 21. See also Guilloux, 'Interview with Claude Miller: "Arrêtons de confondre les tuyaux avec ce qui y circule"', *ibid.*, 26 October 1998.

¹²³ Before Claude Miller, Claude Berri, Jean-Jacques Beinex and Claude Lelouch also held the position of president.

¹²⁴ Since 1990, ARP organises the 'Rencontres Cinématographiques de Beaune'. Film professionals, politicians and film specialists meet and discuss the future of French and European cinema. People as different as Jack Valenti, Marcel Bluwal or Bertrand Tavernier have attended these meetings. Both Jack Ralite and Aline Pailler have attended the Rencontres cinématographiques de Beaune (See for instance, Ange-Dominique Bouzet, 'Beaune, le cinéma sous de bons auspices', *Libération*, 31 October 1995, p. 36, or Michel Guilloux, 'Les David du cinéma', *L'Humanité*, 27 October 1997, pp. 20-21). The fact that such a variety of participants, representing a wide range of opinions and interests, have been present is emblematic of ARP, which is definitely not as political as the BLOC. The proceedings of these meetings are published every year.

low-budget films. The fact that the issue is far from being resolved is symptomatic of both the divisions and the fragility of the French film industry today as well as the international dimension of the debate. Guilloux's question: 'Will French cinema be reduced to two professional umbrella organisations, themselves associated with two audiovisual groups?' can be answered in the affirmative.¹²⁵ It also shows that 'in spite of a large production and a steady increase in spectatorship, French cinema remains a fragile industry, likely to suffer from the global market and its ultraliberalism.'¹²⁶ The welfare of the independent sector depends on a TV network whose majority shareholder is Vivendi, one of France's largest multinationals. In view of the activities in the global market, its future in the long term remains unsure. Ironically, as a supporter of independent cinema, the PCF has become supportive of its worst enemy, albeit unwillingly.¹²⁷

In 1999 Claude Zidi's *Astérix et Obélix contre César* has proven a telling example of both the situation of French cinema today and the Communist position regarding film at the turn of the century. On the one hand, a significant part of the Parisian press considered that *Astérix and Obélix contre César* might be a solution to counter the increasing impact of Hollywood cinema on France's film economy.¹²⁸ On the other the Communists, and the independent sector, held the view that *Astérix* should not be defended on those grounds.¹²⁹ Even the fact that Berri hired 1500 extras and gave work to many film workers and technicians for twenty-four weeks was insufficient for the PCF.¹³⁰ Given the huge number of screens it mobilised on its opening week it had the same effect on the other French films

¹²⁵ Guilloux, 'Double menace sur les films indépendants', *L'Humanité*, 24 April 1999.

¹²⁶ Jean-Pierre Jeancolas, 'Blic, Bloc et drôles de bouquets', *Positif*, n° 460, June 1999, p. 2.

¹²⁷ Michel Guilloux, 'Le cinéma français se mobilise pour et contre Canal Plus'; *L'Humanité*, 3 March 1999, p. 19; Michel Guilloux, 'A bon regardeur salut', *ibid.*, 6 March 1999, p. 25; 'Échanges mutuels pour Vivendi et Pathé', *ibid.*, 8 June 1999; 'La bataille des chaînes payantes en Europe', *ibid.*, 10 June 1999; Christophe Auxerre, 'Veni, Vidi, Vivendi', *ibid.*, 12 June 1999; 'BSkyB: Rupert Murdoch succède à Jérôme Seydoux', *ibid.*, 17 June 1999. See also Jean-Henri Roger, 'Ce qui est dit est dit', *La Lettre de la SRF*, n° 66, May 1999, p. 4.

¹²⁸ See Ange-Dominique Bouzet: 'The French film sector hopes that the superproduction will help the film industry to recover its market share after last year's *Titanic*'s onslaught', 'Astérix et Obélix, la guerre des salles', *Libération*, 3 February 1999, p. 2, and Yann Tobin, 'L'euro-pudding est-il soluble dans la potion magique?', *Positif*, n° 458, April 1999, p. 2.

¹²⁹ Didier Rochet, 'Alea Jacta est ou le coup du menhir', *L'Humanité Hebdo*, 28 January-3 February 1999, p. 49.

¹³⁰ It must be said that Berri does not have a good reputation among film extras. Those who were recruited for *Germinal* were paid below the union rate. See appendice n° 22, pp. 401-11.

released the same week as a big Hollywood blockbuster. If in the short term and considering merely the commercial perspective, it does compete favourably with American superproductions, in the long term, Zidi's magic potion might prove rather poisonous and independent French production could be smothered by the overweight of Obélix.¹³¹

7.4. The PCF and Film: the Transformation

In 1998, and for the first time ever, the leader of the PCF came to visit the Cannes Film Festival. Hue visited the *Fédération du Spectacle* where he met with René Vautier, Michel Gauthrin and Jean Voirin, visited the marquee of the CCAS, watched Gilles Bourdos's *Disparus*, attended the *Cheminots cinéphiles*'s Rail d'Or award ceremony, and had lunch with the ARP, surrounded by Claude Miller, Annie Miller (producer), Pascal Rogard (specialist in international audiovisual negotiations), the directors Gérard Krawczyk and Jacques Fansten, Aline Pailler, Claude Michel, her parliamentary assistant, Jack Ralite et Claudine Joseph from the EGCu, Bernard Vasseur and Fabienne Pourre, both Communist officials.¹³² This visit of the PCF's National Secretary illustrates the changes which have taken place regarding the PCF and the policy it advocates for film. In April 1999, Senator Jack Ralite proposed a law regarding the audiovisual sector or PAF. While it reasserts most of the principles present in the Declaration of Cultural Rights, in particular the importance of the public sector to counteract and balance the liberal sector, it stresses the European dimension of the audiovisual issue. Article 11 recommends that within five years 1 per cent of the different European countries' industrial investments be made on audiovisual and software programmes. It also advocates the creation of different European funds aimed at an increase in the broadcasting and the production of European programmes (a quota of 10 percent of European production other than the one of the broadcasting country).¹³³ In other

¹³¹ Michel Guilloux, 'Une potion magique pour doper le cinéma gaulois', *L'Humanité*, 3 February 1999, p. 20.

¹³² Michel Guilloux, 'Robert Hue: La vraie fête du cinéma', *L'Humanité*, 23 May 1998.

¹³³ Jack Ralite, 'Proposition de loi relative à l'audiovisuel', Sénat, n° 316, April, 1999. See appendice 21, p. 400.

words, the strong public service which the PCF has always defended must now reach the whole of Europe. While such a view may appear particularly utopian in a predominantly liberal and anti-State-control Europe, it is above all symptomatic of the PCF's new stance towards Europe.

Twenty years before, Marchais considered that the problems of French cinema had to be dealt with in Paris, and expressed his amazement that Mitterrand's cultural adviser (Jack Lang?) should call on Simone Veil, president of the European Parliament, to tackle the issue of French cinema, and proposed the creation of a "European film school".¹³⁴ Ralite himself argued that 'control of the French film policy ought to be based in France and not in Bonn or Brussels'.¹³⁵ Europe was still seen as a forum dedicated to American interests. According to Gérard Vaugeois, in the forthcoming European structure, films would have to conform to a single model, would be "emasculated" (sic) and American producers would take control of the industry, a set of assumptions based on the declarations of a number of European film officials who clearly put the blame for the inadequate level of European film exports on the films made in Europe.¹³⁶ 'Eurocinema', as advocated by large film companies and western governments, would increase the number of superproductions which, Vaugeois indicates, would be devoid of any quality since they would be 'coming from nowhere', and would induce a diminution in the number of auteur films which are 'necessarily from somewhere'.¹³⁷ Vaugeois's position is interesting because although it reasserts the Communist view that the development of European cinema and the furthering of American interests are intertwined, it also equates the notion of auteur cinema with that of national

¹³⁴ Georges Marchais, 'A l'heure des satellites, la responsabilité publique n'a pas à s'évanouir', *Le Film français*, n° 1854, 17 April 1981, pp. 4-5. The main Communist slogan at the time was: 'Made in France' (*Produire français*), and Marchais applied it to every single field: "'Made in France" goes for culture as well', in 'Le combat pour la culture', *L'Espoir au présent* (Paris: Éditions Sociales, 1980), pp. 158-159.

¹³⁵ Jack Ralite, 'Quatorze propositions du Parti communiste', *CinémAction*, 13 (Winter 1981), 69-71

¹³⁶ Such as Augustin Girard, for whom 'Cultural industries are more and more transnational and their transnational products cover cultural and linguistic areas which are now too small to allow national productions', or Dimitri Balachoff, president of the European Film Industries Committee, for whom the films produced in Europe are not the right ones since they fare insignificantly in terms of exportation, Gérard Vaugeois, 'L'Eurocinéma contre la France', *France Nouvelle*, n° 1752, 9-15 June 1979, pp. 40-41. See also André Gisselbrecht, 'L'anglo-américain, langue d'Europe', *France Nouvelle*, n° 1755, 30 June-6 July 1979, pp. 29-31.

¹³⁷ Jack Ralite quoted in Gérard Vaugeois, 'L'Eurocinéma contre la France', *France Nouvelle*, 9-15 June 1979, pp. 40-41.

production. The PCF was to remain extremely anti-European for many years.¹³⁸ Indeed it is only in the first months of 1999 that it has changed its position over Europe. But regarding the film industry, the Communist change towards Europe had already happened a few years before, not least thanks to the work of Aline Pailler.¹³⁹ A TV journalist by trade, Pailler was elected on the Communist European list in 1994. She was one of the first concrete illustrations of the changes which were taking place since Hue took over as Party leader. Although not a Party-member herself, she was seventh in the list headed by Francis Wurtz, and was therefore guaranteed election. Pailler saw the issue of cinema as a European one. Cultural issues, such as cinema and the audiovisual sector as a whole, were not officially recognised at a European level until the 1992 Maastricht Treaty.¹⁴⁰ She became an impassioned advocate of 'cultural exception', fighting to give it some substance at the European level but lamenting the fact that European MPs did not see Culture as a prioritised item on their agendas.¹⁴¹ Film and audiovisual issues figure prominently in *Regards d'Europe*, a publication in which she detailed her activities in the European Parliament. For instance, in the second issue, she interviewed Michelle Soullignac of the SRF who announces the creation of BLOC, while Claude Michel related Hue's visit to Cannes, and the latter's meeting with the independent film sector.¹⁴² Between the 1994 European elections and June 1999, the Communist discourse on Europe and film echoed Pailler's European involvement. In 1997, Pierre Courcelles underlined that 'the struggle for the defence of cinema which was once limited to the French context could no longer be fought at a national level, but had to

¹³⁸ See for instance Bell and Criddle, p. 119.

¹³⁹ See appendices 16-19, pp. 393-96.

¹⁴⁰ See Aline Pailler, 'Quelle politique culturelle en Europe?', *Regards d'Europe*, n° 2, June-July 1998, p. 2 (courtesy of Claude Michel), see appendice 20, pp. 397-399. For Article 128 of the Maastricht Treaty, see appendice 15, p. 392.

¹⁴¹ For instance, there was an insufficient number of MEPs present to validate the vote on the revision of the *Télévisions sans frontières* directive which would have made it more effective. See 'La Majorité n'est pas suffisante', Luciana Castellina (President of the Culture Commission of the European Parliament) Press release, in 'A propos de la directive "Télévision sans frontières"', a 14-page document on the directive (courtesy of Claude Michel), or Jean Quatremer, 'Échec de l'audiovisuel européen', *Libération*, 14 November 1996, p. 36.

¹⁴² Claude Michel, 'A côté de la sélection officielle, Cannes, c'est aussi ça', p. 2, and Aline Pailler, interview with Michèle Soullignac, *Regards d'Europe*, n° 2, June-July 1998, p. 3.

take place at the level of Europe.’¹⁴³ Yet he regretted that the fight for the ‘cultural exemption’ did not arouse the interest of France’s fourteen European partners. In the 1999 Cannes Film Festival, the ‘Bouge l’Europe’ list went to Cannes to speak mostly about the European film industry. Jack Ralite quoted the mayor of Venice who declared: ‘pluralism could become very negative if each element does not show any hospitality towards the others’ and Geneviève Fraisse called for a ‘cosmopolitan’ Europe, a loaded adjective in the French Communist context.¹⁴⁴ Following the poor Communist electoral results, a National Committee took place at the PCF’s headquarters, Place du Colonel Fabien. In his contribution, Ralite’s underlined the new stance over Europe:

For the first time, the PCF with its ‘*Bouge l’Europe*’ list adopted a Euroconstructive approach. Europe was the central issue in the election. This is new as at the beginning of January at the Versailles meeting on the ratification of the Amsterdam Treaty we could still have been considered as Eurosceptics. Some comrades, including myself, abstained from voting, *not* because we were forsaking our deep-rooted stand against economic liberalism. But rather because we wanted to take Europe into account as a new public arena in which to fight and to build the elements of a new project.¹⁴⁵

Yet, while the PCF was acknowledging the limit of a film policy confined to the national territory, Aline Pailler, who had been so instrumental in putting audiovisual matters on the European map, lost her seat in the European Parliament. European cinema has lost one of its strongest and most active advocates.¹⁴⁶

On the eve of the twenty-first century, the PCF seems to have chosen its camp and wholeheartedly supports independent cinema. The denunciation of heavyweight superproductions is no longer limited to Hollywood films but now also applies to French blockbusters. While in the late 1960s, popular comedies were defended on the grounds that they were after all necessary light entertainment and a way to counteract the increasing

¹⁴³ Pierre Courcelles, ‘Le Ile Forum du cinéma européen à Strasbourg’, *Regards*, October 1997.

¹⁴⁴ Philippe Jérôme, ‘Bouge la culture en Europe!’, *L’Humanité*, 17 May 1999, p. 24. See Chapters 1, pp. 76-77 and 2, p. 110.

¹⁴⁵ Jack Ralite, *L’Humanité*, 29 June 1999.

¹⁴⁶ Ange-Dominique Bouzet, ‘Aline Pailler, championne de l’audiovisuel’, *Libération*, 31 October 1995.

domination of American productions, in 1999, successful comedies have become the butt of Communist criticism because they are seen as garrotting low-budget films. Jean-Pierre Léonardini underscores the fact that the 1998 French comedy hits, *Le Dîner de cons*, *Les Visiteurs 2* and *Taxi*, did not prevent French cinema from losing ground against Hollywood: big laughs are not French cinema's panacea. He also criticises Marc Tessier's call for the production of wide-ranging popular films, comedies or big historical films which would be able to compete with films like *Titanic*. For the Communist critic this would mean playing on the adversary's ground and would be ultimately detrimental to the creative energy of French cinema. 'Would ten guerilla film-makers not be able to beat megaproductions blown out like a soufflé?'¹⁴⁷ The community of mind between the PCF and BLOC highlights this commitment to supporting of independent production as can be witnessed in an article celebrating the thirty-first anniversary of the *Quinzaine des Réalisateurs* published in *La Lettre de la SRF*.¹⁴⁸ The following text could have been written by a Communist journalist today:

Set up in May 1998, the BLOC regroups two thirds of the film industry's creative force: technicians, distributors, actors, auteurs, directors, producers. If the existence of the BLOC needed justification, the *Quinzaine* would be just that. These two weeks show that everywhere around the world, there is a strong desire to make movies, that everywhere in the world, people make films in order to dream, surprise, confront cultures and ways of looking at the world. The diversity of points of view makes up the richness of cinema all over the world as it makes up the richness of French cinema. Once more French cinema is seen as one of the most dynamic in the world. Notwithstanding those who complain that it is subsided, we all know that it is not by chance that it has acquired such a status, but thanks to an intelligently devised support system and that we should make this system available to others, and in particular to foreign directors. It is precisely this variety and the system of aid which the BLOC wants to preserve and promote in France and in Europe. And if some think that it is a rear-guard battle, let them look at the declaration of Nicolas Seydoux, who claims that many films do not find a place not only in his own cinema theatres, but in any other theatre.¹⁴⁹

For the PCF the diversity of French cinema is the result of the production system established in France thanks to the mobilisation of the film trade over the last fifty years. It is

¹⁴⁷ Jean-Pierre Léonardini, 'Le cinéma con mérite', *L'Humanité*, 30 December 1998.

¹⁴⁸ The *Quinzaine* refers to the Cannes Film Festival's *Quinzaine des Réalisateurs*, set up by the SRF in 1969.

¹⁴⁹ 'Trente... et un an', *La Lettre de la SRF*, n° 66, May 1999, p. 1.

the envy of, and should be a model for, the rest of the world's film industries, bar Hollywood. Above all, in its own eyes, it vindicates the PCF's continuous involvement in the defence of French cinema. In the final chapter of this study, I shall examine how French Communist criticism and the overall Communist film policy came together at last.

Chapter 8: Present Day: Critical Reception

The previous chapter has shown that, in the last number of years, the PCF has been the champion of French independent cinema, advocating measures allowing this sector to resist not only Hollywood's global strategy but also France's own partisans of economic liberalism within the film industry. As this study has sought to establish, the Communist support for independent cinema is the result of a long history. Resistance to independent production among film professionals was long-lived and has only recently been overcome, as evidenced by the *Fédération du Spectacle* supporting the BLOC. The present chapter will show that the defence of independent cinema at an industrial level has been matched by an extremely positive Communist critical reception of the independent sector. This study has shown that in terms of film criticism the recognition of the value, richness, and importance of independent cinema is not the result of a recent turn on the part of critics. Since the New Wave, and even before, during the dogmatic period of the Cold War, a number of Communist critics showed a marked interest for some independent or auteur productions.¹ From the early 1960s to the mid-1990s, there existed a dichotomy between the positions adopted by Communists within the film trade and those supported by many Communist critics. For instance the debate on independent or auteur cinema in the aftermath of May '68 showed the existence of such division.² In 1999 the PCF's critical defence of independent cinema is apparent through both a more circumspect attitude towards French big-budget productions even when the latter draw heavily from the French cultural patrimony, and repeated marks of appreciation for independent films, in particular when these draw their subject-matter from 'the real'. I shall be looking first at the critical reception of France's big productions. Then I shall examine the reception of independent cinema. Finally and by way of conclusion, I shall question the role and importance of the PCF at the turn of the century, at a time when many directors are

¹ See chapter 4. Sadoul, like many *Cahiers*'s critics, supported Robert Bresson or Jacques Tati.

² See chapter 6.

becoming more politically involved through both their films or the positions they take within French society at large.

8.1. Comedies, Swashbucklers and a Few Years in Provence

In the 1990s, notwithstanding American blockbusters, French comedies and period films have been the most successful films at the French box-office, with for instance *Les Visiteurs* (1993) combining both genres. As far as comedies are concerned, Communist critics seem to have grown impatient with French big-budget comedies. Jean-Pierre Léonardini could not be clearer when he entitled his article '*Le cinéma con mérite*', which phonetically translates as 'The films we deserve' but in fact reads 'Stupid films are thriving'.³ Léonardini criticised Francis Veber's *Le Dîner de cons*, Poiré's *Les Visiteurs 2* and Gérard Pirès's *Taxi* for relying too much on heavy Gallic humour. Significantly in 1999 Léonardini was not rebuked for his putting down of three films which have proved extremely popular with the French public, unlike Cervoni thirty years earlier for his negative review of *La Grande Vadrouille*.⁴ Alongside big-budget comedies, Luc Besson has repeatedly been highly successful in terms of audience figures, if not in critical terms. A survivor of the 1980s 'cinéma du look', Luc Besson has decided in the 1990s to 'go global' — his three latest films were shot in English (*Léon*, 1994; *The Fifth Element*, 1997; *Jeanne d'Arc*, 1999), the two most recent with American stars — by mimicking Hollywood narrative format, style and special effects, a strategy which was bound to attract Communist criticism. It certainly did that: while opposing big-budget *The Fifth Element* to films which make people think, Léonardini also criticised *Nikita* and *Léon* for being exact copies of *Terminator*.⁵ In 1999 films which choose an American-style marketing strategy or expensive Gallic comedies are not welcomed

³ Jean-Pierre Léonardini, 'Le cinéma con mérite', *L'Humanité*, 30 December 1998.

⁴ See chapter 6, pp. 226-231.

⁵ 'Les films où l'on pense et les films où l'on dépense', Jean Roy, 'Lucky Luc Goes to America', *L'Humanité*, 8 May 1997. Recently, Fabrice Lanfranchi preferred Steven Spielberg's *Jurassic Park* (1993) to Besson's *Le Grand Bleu* (1988): 'at least Spielberg makes cinema and knows how to tell a story', *ibid.*, 16 February 1999.

by the Communist critics. What has been their attitude to the other popular genre of the 1990s: heritage cinema?

8.1.1. Heritage cinema

Heritage cinema has also been a successful genre in France over the last fifteen years. Claude Berri's extremely popular screen adaptations of Marcel Pagnol's Provençal tales, *Jean de Florette* (1986) and *Manon des Sources* (1986) have opened the way to a number of films using 'canonical sources from the national literature': Zola in Claude Berri's *Germinal* (1993), Hugo in Claude Lelouch's *Les Misérables* (1995), Rostand in Jean-Paul Rappeneau's *Cyrano de Bergerac* (1990), Giono in Rappeneau's *Le Hussard sur le toit* (1995), and Balzac in Yves Angelo's *Le Colonel Chabert* (1994).⁶ The PCF's insistence on the importance of the nation's cultural patrimony has been a regular feature of this study. One would expect that the popularity of these period films was good news for a Party which has always defended the idea of '(national) culture for all'. On the whole the Communist critics's reception of these productions has been sympathetic rather than enthusiastic. *L'Humanité's* critic celebrates in *Jean de Florette* the 'revival of a type of spectacular cinema which is both popular and of a high quality, in the narrative tradition'.⁷ But according to *La Vie ouvrière's* critic, Claude Berri's *Jean de Florette* is 'a well-made film, which the public will enjoy', but he warns his readers not to look for a masterpiece, and for Marseilles-born Émile Breton, 'what is missing in the film is Pagnol's particular brand of fantasy'.⁸ The second film is even more lukewarmly received: 'Berri is no Pagnol' and *Manon des Sources* 'is no longer a tale, Berri mixes Pagnol with Zola'.⁹ Claude Lelouch's *Les Misérables* is 'spectacular cinema

⁶ See *Encyclopedia of European Cinema*, ed. by Ginette Vincendeau (London: BFI/Cassell, 1995), p. 204.

⁷ Claude Sartirano, 'Jean De Florette', *L'Humanité Dimanche*, n° 71, 29 August 1986.

⁸ J.-C. K., 'Jean de Florette', *La Vie ouvrière*, n° 2193, 8 September 1986; Émile Breton, 'Conter Florette', *Révolution*, n° 339, 29 August 1986, p. 31. Significantly Breton insists that Berri's superproduction may prevent some independent films from getting the attention and success they deserve: '[*Jean de Florette*] should not make one forget about Gérard Frot-Coutaz's *Beau temps mais orageux en fin de journée* and Benoît Jacquot's *Corps et biens*.

⁹ Breton, 'Bis', *Révolution*, n° 351, 21 November 1986; Sartirano, 'Manon des Sources', *L'Humanité Dimanche*, n° 83, 21 November 1986; Jean Roy, 'Le temps de l'expiation', *L'Humanité*, *ibid.*

which does not proclude emotion'.¹⁰ Jean-Paul Rappeneau's *Cyrano de Bergerac* receives a better treatment: '*Cyrano de Bergerac* is one of the best swashbuckler films ever made in France'.¹¹

One may actually wonder whether Communist critics are not holding back their criticisms. For instance they seem at times to stretch the modern social or political reading which can be made of some of these films. Thus *Le Colonel Chabert* becomes 'a denunciation of the evils of capitalist society', and Patrice Leconte's *Ridicule*, 'smart and full of brilliance', is also portraying the turpitude of the ruling class.¹² On the contrary, 'no one can seriously say anything against [Jean-Paul Rappeneau's *Le Hussard sur le toit*] which is romantic, full of emotion, with a fair share of spectacular scenes, but which may be lacking in substance'.¹³ Similarly, if *Beaumarchais, l'insolent* is a pleasing spectacle, there is little in the film which relates to today's social and political issues'.¹⁴ For Michel Guilloux, Édouard Molinaro's 'heavyweight' superproduction 'might not have been the best vehicle for a film portraying the founder of the '*droit d'auteur*', in effect pointing to a fundamental characteristic of French cinema, i.e. the perceived incompatibility of auteur cinema with big-budget cinema, or spectacular productions.¹⁵ Yet for Rappeneau, the spectacular must remain part of French cinema and not be left solely to the Americans, citing as precedents Carné's *Les Enfants du paradis*, Ophüls's *Lola Montès*, and Renoir's *French Cancan*.¹⁶

¹⁰ Guilloux, 'Le plaisir de tourner', *L'Humanité*, 22 March 1995, p. 20; Guilloux, '*Les Misérables*, pour Claude Lelouch, c'est d'abord un souvenir d'enfance', *ibid*; Le Morvan, 'Les Misérables du XXe siècle', *L'Humanité Dimanche*, n° 262, 23-29 March 1995, pp. 26-27.

¹¹ Le Morvan, 'Les vers du nez', *L'Humanité*, 28 March 1990; Marcel Martin, 'Histoire de nez', *Révolution*, n° 526, 30 March 1990, p. 47.

¹² Jean Roy, 'Quand Balzac est bien traité', *L'Humanité*, 21 September 1994, pp. 22-23; Pierre Barbancey, 'Interviews with Fabrice Luchini (Derville), Fanny Ardant (la comtesse Ferraud), and Yves Angelo', *L'Humanité*, *ibid*; Guilloux, 'Patrice Leconte dans le grand zoo de Versailles', *L'Humanité*, 9 May 1996, pp. 3-4; Guilloux, 'De la politique comme rapport de farces', *ibid.*, p. 4; Le Morvan, 'Quand le ridicule tue vraiment', *L'Humanité Dimanche*, n° 321, 9-15 May 1996, p. 62; Le Morvan, 'Interview with Judith Godrèche', *ibid.*, pp. 60-62.

¹³ Le Morvan, 'A pied, à cheval et en toiture', *L'Humanité Dimanche*, n° 288, 21-27 September 1995, p. 62.

¹⁴ Le Morvan, 'Beaumarchais, le libertin', *L'Humanité Dimanche*, n° 314, 21-27 March 1996, p. 78.

¹⁵ Guilloux, 'Les décors sont de Bordeaux et les images d'Épinal', *L'Humanité*, 23 March 1996, p. 17.

¹⁶ Guilloux, Interview with Jean-Paul Rappeneau, 'La chevauchée fantastique de Jean-Paul Rappeneau sur les terres de Giono', *L'Humanité*, 15 September 1994, p. 11.

This nostalgia for the Saturday night popular spectacular is also present in Gilles Le Morvan's review of Bertrand Tavernier's *La Fille de d'Artagnan*: 'There is no need to look at the film from a socio-political perspective [...] The film was not made for the edification of the masses, but simply to entertain them. It is a treat.'¹⁷ At times this nostalgia for quality popular cinema is coupled with a feeling of despondency. In a somehow depressed tone, Guilloux only hopes that these heritage films (those based on popular classics) might 'make one want to read or impede American penetration *a little...*' (my emphasis).¹⁸ Similarly, Philippe de Broca's *Le Bossu* does not fully satisfy *L'Humanité*'s Jean Roy, although he describes it as 'a good show'. Interestingly the critic links the film to the *Tradition de qualité* of the 1950s:

Once upon a time in the 1950s, films were made that their critics ironically labelled '*qualité française*'. These films were made with great actors, established technicians, excellent script-writers who were not ashamed to look into our literary patrimony and aimed at giving, in all modesty, the Saturday night spectator a bit of pleasure. The quality of these films could not be denied but these films also showed that their directors did not take any risk. This is why their academicism was denounced by *Cahiers*'s young Turks such as François Truffaut. Ironically, Philippe de Broca, who started his career as Truffaut's and Chabrol's assistant belongs to their generation. He made his first film in 1959 and in 1961 hired Jean-Paul Belmondo who was a typical New Wave actor. Today de Broca is considered as the most authentic heir of a generation which comprised Maurice Cloche, Jean Delannoy, Christian-Jaque or Yves Allégret, but of which he was never a member. More damaging for them than the smart critics, television has taken over this type of productions. TV fictions have replaced the Saturday film at your next door cinema [...] The exceptions to the rules are the well advertised big-budget productions such as *Cyrano de Bergerac*, *Le Hussard sur le toit*, *Le Colonel Chabert*, *Germinal*, *Jean de Florette* or *Manon des sources*. Thus *Le Bossu* has been shot in French with our best actors and our best technicians. It is a state-of-the-art production, which should satisfy customers both in France and in the world at large [...] Why should we complain about it? Pangloss asked. Why should we simply accept it? Zadig replied.¹⁹

¹⁷ Le Morvan, 'Tous pour une', *L'Humanité Dimanche*, n° 232, 25-31 August 1994, p. 58.

¹⁸ Guilloux, 'Vue cavalière sur la Provence de Giono', *L'Humanité*, 20 September 1995, p. 18; Géraldine Valda, 'Juliette Binoche face à Pauline', *ibid.*; 'Peter Kirkpatrick, 'Catherine Dupire a peint le tournage sur le vif', *ibid.*, pp. 18-19.

¹⁹ Roy, 'Nous irons tous à Lagardère', *L'Humanité*, 3 December 1997, p. 19; Serge Rémy, 'Tout l'art de rire comme un bossu', *L'Humanité Hebdo*, n° 3, 20-26 November 1997, p. 48; Claude Baudry, 'Interview with Pierre Carliez: "Lagardère vient à vous"', *ibid.*, n° 7, 1-7 January 1998, p. 51. Significantly when a figure of French cinema from another era passes away, it is often Samuel Lachize who is called to write the Communist obituaries. Thus Gilles Grangier is praised for 'having made films where there is no ratiocination on philosophy, metaphysics or the state of the world. Popular films are the films which bring people into cinemas and make them leave with a beaming smile', Samuel Lachize, 'Gilles Grangier: un cinéaste "populaire"', *L'Humanité*, 30 April 1996, p. 21.

8.1.2. The Particular Case of Claude Berri's *Germinal*²⁰

The Communist critics' dissatisfaction with these highly produced heritage films coincides with a further move towards independent cinema which has occurred in the last five years. In this context, the reception of Claude Berri's *Germinal* in 1993 was one of the last examples where the critics' discourse was in contradiction with the accolade the PCF as a whole gave to the film and thus may be seen as a turning point in the relationship between the critics and their Party.

None of the Communist critics praised *Germinal* to the skies. Léonardini considered that the film was 'too laboured', lacked 'the necessary pathos', and that while the details were well done, the film as a whole did not deliver the 'symphonic unison' he expected.²¹ Le Morvan criticised both the film's casting and Berri's direction of actors while being even more critical of the film's dialogues which he found akin to an 'outdated *langue de bois*'.²² In *Révolution* Luce Vigo regretted that the contemporaneity of the film was due only to Zola's words rather than Berri's own contribution.²³ In spite of these rather lukewarm reviews, the coverage the Communist press devoted to the film was impressive. While Léonardini's article was only one column long, *L'Humanité* of 29 September 1993 devoted five pages to the film and Luce Vigo had the surprise to find her disappointed review entitled '*Germinal* is Wonderful'. This dichotomic reception is not altogether surprising since Zola's *Germinal* holds a particular place in the French Communist 'ideal library'. Yet the reception given to Berri's adaptation differs from previous ones. While the reception of Yves Allégret's *Germinal* thirty years earlier was not unlike Berri's, it was left solely to the film critics. Thus Marcel Martin, twenty years before Luce Vigo, praised the writer more than the director. But the 1963 adaptation did not provoke such an avalanche of articles around the film. On the

²⁰ For a more detailed analysis of the French Communist reception of Berri's *Germinal*, see Laurent Marie, 'La nostalgie est toujours ce qu'elle était, la réception communiste de *Germinal* de Claude Berri', *Excavatio*, 11 (1997), 154-159, reproduced in appendice 22, pp. 401-411.

²¹ Léonardini, *L'Humanité*, 29 September 1993.

²² Le Morvan, *L'Humanité Dimanche*, 23 September 1993.

²³ Luce Vigo, *Révolution*, n° 710, 7 October 1993.

contrary, Lachize praised the film-maker for having respected the spirit of Zola without drawing arbitrary parallels with the contemporary situation. Allégret himself claimed to have shown the past not the present. At the time Allégret's film was released the French miners had just gone through their last long industrial dispute. Nevertheless the miners still belonged to the working-class 'aristocracy'. To draw too heavily on a parallel between Zola's miners' fate and theirs might have evoked unpleasant sordid images. Less than twenty years separated the *Bataille de la Production*, Thorez's speech at Waziers and, above all, the nationalisation of the mine industry (17 May 1946) and the vote of the *statut des mineurs* which instituted the miners' free accommodation and free heating (14 June 1946) from Allégret's *Germinal*. The French miners were still benefiting from the reforms which the PCF — almost single-handedly according to the Party's mythology — implemented. To force a Zolaesque reading on the film would have meant belittling the Party's achievements on the miners' behalf. For the same reasons, *Germinal* is not mentioned either in the papers which marked the release of Daquin's *Le Point du jour*: the miners were no longer the uncouth, unpolitical beings driven by violent passions depicted by Zola, they had become the proud and industrious saviours of the nation. When *Le Point du jour* or 1963 *Germinal* were released both the working class and the PCF were significant social and political forces. The situation had changed dramatically when Berri's *Germinal* came out. Having just suffered its heaviest defeat since June 1968, the French Left was in disarray with the *peuple de gauche* still in shock. Claude Berri himself played on this to launch his film. Most of the film's main actors discovered and publicised that they had working-class ancestors, many of them miners. Berri insisted on the parallel between the conditions of the miners in 1993 and a century earlier. The PCF himself stressed this aspect as well. The extras, of whom many were miners who had lost their job when the pits closed, are compared to Zola's characters. Communist journalists reporting from the film's shooting location found in the people they met 'the same dignity and the same painful condition' than at the time of Zola, with the president of the Nord-Pas-de-Calais CGT section 'winning over his listeners at once, like

Lantier'. It suffices to look at the situation of the PCF in 1993 to understand the motives behind these comments.

Germinal came out at a time when the PCF was at an all-time low. In 1993, its share of the French electoral vote was only 6.4 per cent, while the Party was facing competition with the extreme right in many of its traditional working-class bastions.²⁴ Moreover as Communism in Eastern Europe collapsed, so did the PCF's points of orientation. French Communists found refuge in nostalgia. As Jacqueline Nacache explained: 'the awareness of loss and the aspiration for a lost ideal, which is part and parcel of nostalgia, are inseparable from utopia and regret for an harmonious world'.²⁵ These terms define precisely the French Communists' state of mind in 1993. Berri's adaptation of Zola's working-class novel was therefore highly symbolic for the PCF and deserved to be defended in spite of the film's shortcomings as pinpointed by the Party's critics. Written thirty years before the Bolshevik revolution, *Germinal* and its revolutionary message not only justified past struggles but also the existence of the PCF in the 1990s. Its reception was an act of purification. As the articles surrounding its release emphasised the contemporary echoes of the film's depiction of social inequalities, the PCF was able to both obliterate the stigma of deposed foreign models and reassert its anchorage in France's national history.

²⁴ See Roger Martelli, '1993 : un résultat communiste en demi-teinte', *Société française*, 46, Spring 1993.

²⁵ Jacqueline Nacache, 'L'hommage et la nostalgie', in *Pour un cinéma comparé*, ed. by Jacques Aumont (Paris : Cinémathèque française, 1996), pp. 299-317.

8.2. The PCF as champion of independent production

In the second half of the 1990s, the PCF's disinclination to back French big-budget productions, ranging from lukewarm support to open dislike, even when these were adaptations of popular French classics, evolved alongside a renewed and more fervent support for French independent productions. Before looking at the critical reception of this production, it will be useful to portray the relationship between the Communist and French independent cinema in the last ten years.

8.2.1. French Independent Cinema and the Communist Press in the 1990s

The PCF's critical defence of independent cinema has been a regular feature of the work of French Communist critics for a long time. In *France Nouvelle* for instance during the late 1970s, the place devoted to film was necessarily limited as the journal was not a film journal, but a Communist weekly. In charge of the cinema section, Albert Cervoni selected only films which he wanted to promote. Most of these belonged to the category of French independent or auteur cinema or non-Hollywood international production. Cervoni showed a strong attachment to the independent sector of French film production, often reviewing it extremely positively.²⁶ As an example, Cervoni praised Jean-Claude Guiguet's *Les Belles Manières* for proving the existence of a young French auteur cinema, while two weeks later he complained that this young French cinema was absent from the 'Semaine de la critique' in Cannes.²⁷ Cervoni's defence of auteur cinema in France echoed the positions in favour of public support for the independent sector taken by Ralite or Marchais as seen in the previous chapter.²⁸

²⁶ Cervoni regrets that Alain Cavalier does not make more films, see 'Martin et Lea', n° 1734, 5 February 1979'. Other independent French films reviewed include Charles Nemès' *Les Héros n'ont pas froid aux oreilles*, n° 1730, 7 January 1979; *Un Balcon en forêt* by Michel Mitrani, n° 1738, 5 March 1979; Rohmer's *Perceval le Gallois*, n° 1735, 12 February 1979.

²⁷ Cervoni, 'A propos de deux films français', *France Nouvelle*, n° 1746, 28 April-4 May 1979, pp. 42-43; Cervoni, 'La Semaine de la critique: un absent de marque, dira-t-on: le jeune cinéma français', 12-18 May 1979, pp. 40-41.

²⁸ See chapter 7, p. 289.

The interest in international film production other than Hollywood cinema has always been favoured by French Communist critics. Georges Sadoul's encyclopaedic knowledge of world cinema may be regarded as the source of such an interest, coupled with the political will to report on the difficulties of developing countries' national productions in spite of 'American imperialism'. In the wake of Sadoul, Cervoni kept a close interest in African, South-American or Asian productions until he ended his career as a critic in the late 1970s.²⁹ Since then and up to the present day, Breton has often devoted his weekly articles for *L'Humanité* or his monthly papers for *Regards* to less well-known directors and films from the five continents.³⁰

Nevertheless the majority of the films covered in the Communist press came from France. This has been evidenced by a study made by Michel Gomez for ARP and the CNC which clearly indicates the Communist preference for French cinema.³¹ The study examined the press coverage of all films released in France between 31 August 1994 and 29 March 1995. While *L'Humanité* covered 37 per cent of first releases, 55 per cent of these were French films, 17 per cent American films and 42 per cent from the rest of the world.³² *L'Humanité Dimanche* covered 33 per cent of first releases, 33 per cent of these were French films, 27 per cent American films and 42 per cent from the rest of the world.³³ From these figures the authors of this study drew the conclusion that *L'Humanité's* coverage of film was rather poor. Yet they also stated that the Communist daily was giving priority to articles (78 per cent) rather than short reviews (19 per cent) and interviews (11 per cent).³⁴ Although rather short, most articles were largely positive (63 per cent) while the short reviews often negative

²⁹ See for instance *France Nouvelle*, whose film pages were directed by Cervoni, first quarter 1979: Claude Gaignaire, 'Vus de Carthage, les cinémas africains et arabes', n° 1729, 1 January 1979, pp. 25-27, Cervoni, 'De Budapest à Téhéran', n° 1731, 14 January 1979, pp. 43-44; Frank Cassenti, 'Viva el presidente de Miguel Littin', n° 1741, 26 March 1979, p. 41.

³⁰ See 'Gros plan', Breton's regular section in *L'Humanité*, and 'Collages' in *Regards*.

³¹ Michel Gomez and Sylvie Monin, *Presse et Cinéma* (Paris: L'ARP & le CNC, January 1996). See appendice 23, pp. 412-413.

³² By comparison, *Le Figaro* covered 80 per cent of first releases, including 80 % French, 82 % American and 75 % rest of the world; *Libération*, 86 %, including respectively 89 %, 83 % and 85 %, Gomez, pp. 47 & 97. See appendix, p.

³³ By comparison, *Le Nouvel Observateur*, covered 91 per cent of first releases, including 94 % French, 90 American and 90% rest of the world; *L'Événement du Jeudi*, 42 %, including respectively , 39 %, 44 % and 45 %, Gomez, pp. 48 & 98. See appendix , p.

³⁴ Gomez, p. 125.

(36 per cent) or neutral (64 per cent). The articles reviewing French films were overwhelmingly positive (82 per cent) while only a minority of American films were so reviewed (10 per cent). Films from the rest of the world enjoy a treatment similar to French films albeit marginally less positive (67 per cent).³⁵ *L'Humanité Dimanche* favours short reviews to long ones and while devoting significantly less coverage to American films is more even in qualitative terms. Moreover it was the only outlet to favour mostly films from the rest of the world.³⁶

The conclusions the authors drew from their survey raise a number of questions. The conclusion that the Communist press film coverage, in particular that of *L'Humanité*, is inadequate does not seem to take into account that it is not a daily paper like any other. It is the only one among the national papers under scrutiny which is affiliated to a political party. Its readership is significantly less than say *Le Figaro*, *Le Monde*, *Le Parisien Libéré* or *Libération*. Compared to the latter which is on average 45-page long, *L'Humanité* is only about 25-page long. Its film section is therefore likely to be shorter than that of other papers. Consequently its preference for articles over brief reviews indicates an editorial selection and therefore a critical point of view. This warranted a closer analysis than that offered by Gomez and Monin's useful but ultimately inadequate report. In addition the three categories under which the reviews were classified — positive, neutral, negative — did not fully embrace the subtleties and innuendos of the critics' judgments. Finally the study did not differentiate between mainstream and independent productions. The reception of heritage films would undoubtedly have been deemed positive by the report's authors, whereas, as I have shown, the reviews they received in the Communist press were less than ecstatic. By contrast, a study of the Communist reception of French independent cinema would have shown a more consistently positive attitude on the critics' part. This reception which will be examined presently also underlines the changes which occurred within the Communist press.

³⁵ Ibid., pp. 125-126.

³⁶ Ibid., pp. 155-156.

Until the 1990s, independent productions tended to be covered in the Communist journals which targeted the more highly educated section of the PCF's readership (*Les Lettres françaises*, *La Nouvelle Critique* among others).³⁷ In the short-lived reissue of *Les Lettres françaises* (1989-1993) relaunched by Jean Ristat, the film section directed by Émile Breton dealt exclusively with independent and auteur cinema: for instance its pilot issue, published as a supplement to *Digraphe*, set the standard with an article on Straub and Huillet's *La Mort d'Empedocle* (1987).³⁸ At the beginning of the 1990s, Jean Ristat's *Les Lettres françaises* may have been too avant-garde and daring for the Party's liking — it released an illustrated issue on pornography and it gave hospitality to the gay publication *Le Gai-pied* — and did not get the financial support necessary for its continuation. Following *Révolution* (1981-1995) which had replaced both *La Nouvelle Critique* and *France Nouvelle*, the PCF has brought out a new monthly, *Regards*, in March 1995, which takes its name from a pre-war Communist journal. In the past a dichotomy between popular cinema and auteur cinema could be detected in the selection of films reviewed in the respective journals' film sections. Nowadays this difference is far less marked. There is no clash between *L'Humanité* and *Regards* in terms of the choice of films their respective critics support. Obviously the fact that, like Breton, critics write in both outlets is not irrelevant to this new state of affairs.

³⁷ See chapter 6.

³⁸ 'Straub et Huillet reviennent sur Holderlin et Empedocle', *Les Lettres françaises*, n° 1, Supplément à *Digraphe*, n° 50, December 1989. See for instance See also Jean-Daniel Pollet, in *Les Lettres françaises*, n° 2, March 1990 p. 11; Jean-Pierre Touati, 'Entretien avec Manoel de Oliveira', Dominique Païni on Straub and Huillet, Breton on Turkish cinema and Lüfti Akad, *Les Lettres françaises*, n° 1, July 1990; Luce Vigo, 'Des pierres dans la fiction' on Palestinian cinema, Breton on Kazakh cinema, *ibid.*, n° 2, October 1990; Karel Reisz in *ibid.*, n°4, December 1990; an article in the film section of the fifth issue, incidentally entitled 'Le Minotaure', thus recalling the post-war *L'Écran français*, wonders why the special issue of *Cahiers du cinéma* on Godard does not contain anything on the director's militant period, n° 5, January 1991; Serge Daney in 'Guerre et Paix', n° hors-série, p. 21; an article praising Serge Daney in n° 8 April 1991, Bernard Eisenschitz on the Festival of Jérusalem and Vigo on Philippe Garrel, n° 12, September 1991; Godard, in n° 19, April 1992, pp. 17-24.

8.2.2. The 'Real' at Last

Since the beginning of the 1990s, independent films marked a return towards the depiction of the 'real' (*le réel*) contrasting with the 'glossy Eighties', epitomised by Annaud, Besson, and Beineix. The consequences on the underprivileged of the economic, political and social crisis which has been affecting France in the last fifteen years has become a common backdrop for the 1990s' filmic narratives. From the wave of 'banlieue' films to the social outcasts depicted by Manuel Poirier, Robert Guédiguian or the Dardenne brothers, from the 'personal documentaries' of Hervé Le Roux and Denis Gheerbrant to the 'documented fictions' of Laetitia Masson and Sandrine Veysset, the French — and Belgian — 'social' films of the 1990s have not only received critical appreciation, in many instances they also met with public recognition. Many commentators have noted both this resurgence of a cinema which is rooted in the real world and its remarkable public success.³⁹

It almost goes without saying that the new relationship between French cinema and 'the real' was warmly welcomed by the Communist critics. Their call for a cinema which would tackle contemporary issues by dealing with people's 'real lives', has been a recurrent feature of their critical discourse since the Liberation and seems to have been answered in the last decade. This was what they found missing in the New Wave films.⁴⁰ The post-May '68 period was marked by a split between militant cinema, auteur cinema and mainstream political thrillers.⁴¹ In the last few years, and for the first time to such an extent, many auteur films marry the personal and the political, in a cinema which is 'both in the first person and

³⁹ See Claude-Marie Trémois, *Les Enfants de la liberté. Le jeune cinéma français des années 90* (Paris: Seuil, 1997); Jean-Pierre Jeancolas, 'Une bobine d'avance. Du cinéma et de la politique en février 1997', *Positif*, n° 434, April 1997, pp. 56-58; Julien Husson, 'Éloge du jeune cinéma français', *La Lettre du cinéma*, n° 3, Autumn 1997, pp. 4-23; Michel Marie, ed., *Le Jeune Cinéma français* (Paris: Nathan, 1998); Tanguy Perron, 'Vie, mort et renouveau du cinéma politique', in 'Cinéma engagé. Cinéma enragé', *L'Homme et la société*, 127-128 (Paris: L'Harmattan, 1998/1-2), pp. 7-14; Jeancolas, 'Requalifier le politique', *Positif*, n° 455, January 1999, pp. 46-48; Émile Breton, 'Tours et détours du cinéma français', *Commune*, n° 13, Ventôse 207 (February 1999), pp. 9-12; Jeancolas, 'Un cinéma de la responsabilité: esquisse de cartographie du cinéma français vivant en 1998', *Australian Journal of French Studies*, Vol. XXXVI, 1 (January-April 1999), pp. 12-25.

⁴⁰ See chapter 4, pp. 167-68.

⁴¹ See chapter 6.

connected to “the real””.⁴² This is true of both documentaries such as Hervé Le Roux’s *Reprise* (1997) and Claire Simon’s *Coûte que coûte* (1995) and fiction films such as Jean-François Richet’s *Ma 6-T va Crack-er* (1997) or Dominique Cabrera’s *Nadia et les hippopotames* (1999).

Thus the wave of ‘banlieue’ films, among which Mathieu Kassovitz’s *La Haine* is probably the best-known outside France, received positive reviews.⁴³ The fact that the PCF has long been a significant political presence in the *banlieue* of Paris and other large French cities is obviously linked to this reception. Jean-François Richet’s films with their explicit references to class struggle and Marxism were particularly welcomed in the Communist press.⁴⁴

Auteurs who, while setting their films in different regions of France, nevertheless tackle economic and social issues have also been extensively covered in the Communist press. For Guilloux, Laetitia Masson’s *En avoir (ou pas)* (1996) represented ‘the new cinema we like to see’.⁴⁵ Manuel Poirier’s humanist auteur cinema, as illustrated by *Western* (1997), is considered ‘intelligent and funny’.⁴⁶ The critics appreciate the combination of social reality and fable which characterises many of these films, Sandrine Veysset’s *Y aura-t-il de la neige à Noël?* being a case in point. For the PCF, this young French cinema is the filmic

⁴² Ginette Vincendeau, ‘Back to the Blackboard’, *Sight and Sound*, n° 7, July 1999, p. 15.

⁴³ *La Haine* (1995): Serge Rémy, ‘Banlieue haute tension’, *L’Humanité*, 29 May 1995, p. 20; Michel Levieux, ‘Interview with Mathieu Kassovitz: “Le noir et blanc draine plus de réalisme”’, *ibid*; Le Morvan, ‘Interview with Mathieu Kassovitz: “Regarde les jeunes tomber”’, *L’Humanité Dimanche*, n° 270, 18-24 May 1995, pp. 60-61. *État des lieux* (1995): Guilloux, ‘Deux lascars qui en veulent’, *L’Humanité*, 14 June 1995; Nicolas Duffour, ‘Un antidote à *La Haine*’, *L’Humanité Hebdo*, n° 8, 8-14- January 1998, p. 57. *Bye-Bye* (1995): Edmond Gilles, ‘Karim Dridi: amour, respect, dignité et responsabilité’, *L’Humanité*, 14 September 1995, p. 24; Gilles Smajda, ‘Le Panier, miroir d’un Marseille encore populaire’, *ibid*, pp. 24-25; Rémy, ‘Une vie à soi’, *L’Humanité Dimanche*, n° 285, 31 August-6 September 1995, p. 61. *Ma 6T va crack-er* (1997): Rémy, ‘Impasse du désespoir’, *L’Humanité Dimanche*, n° 381, 15-21 May 1997, p. 56; Barbancey, ‘La cité qui tire plus vite que son ombre’, *L’Humanité*, 17 May 1997, p. 18; Guilloux, ‘Interview with Jean-François Richet: “Qu’ils récoltent ce qu’ils sèment”’, *ibid.*, 2 July 1997, p. 20; Guilloux, ‘Les damnés de l’artère’, *ibid.*, p. 21. See also Vigo, ‘Ce cinéma qui habite la banlieue’, *Regards*, September 1995.

⁴⁴ On Jean-François Richet, see Christine Masson, ‘Entretien avec Jean-François Richet’, in *Le Jeune Cinéma français*, ed. by Michel Marie (Paris: Nathan, 1998), pp. 112-115.

⁴⁵ Guilloux, ‘Un homme et une femme (française) sans chabadabada’, *L’Humanité*, 10 January 1996, p. 22.

⁴⁶ ‘Paco et Nino vont en auto’, *L’Humanité Dimanche*, n° 374, 15-21 May 1997, pp. 74-75; Roy, ‘Il était une fois en Bretagne’, *L’Humanité*, 10 May 1997, p. 20; Guilloux: ‘De l’utopie en pays bigouden’, *L’Humanité*, 27 August 1997, p. 17; Manuel Poirier: ‘J’ai envie de parler des gens qui veulent vivre’, *ibid*; Le Morvan, ‘Le cinéaste des rencontres’, *L’Humanité Dimanche*, n° 389, 28 August-3 September 1997, p. 76.

illustration of the citizens' society (*'la société citoyenne'*) the Party advocates: 'It is not because it is the easy option that I associate Poirier, Dumont and Ferreira-Barbosa, but in order to show that a new *cinéma citoyen* is emerging'.⁴⁷

In this respect, given that Robert Guédiguian's films epitomise this '*cinéma citoyen*' and in view of the director's own personal history of political involvement, it comes as no surprise that Guédiguian's films have received particular attention in the PCF's press. In 1996, Robert Guédiguian's *A la vie, à la mort* was granted the 'Prix Paul-Vaillant-Couturier', a French Communist award. For Pierre Zarka, director of *L'Humanité*, the film had its place in the great tradition of French cinema, with characters who never obey a pre-established scheme.⁴⁸ When the film had been released a few months earlier, Le Morvan, for whom it was 'an indispensable' film, had complained that 'the dictatorship of the media ignored the film'.⁴⁹ While *A la vie, à la mort* brought critical praise to Guédiguian, his next film, *Marius et Jeannette*, brought him popular fame and success and further Communist accolade — the film had a preview screening for the 'Amis de *L'Huma*'.⁵⁰ While one may find the film 'ideologically nostalgic and naïve', as Michael Temple does, it is also possible to see it as a truthful illustration of many French left-wingers' current state-of-mind.⁵¹ The community the film portrays corresponds quite closely to a particular section of the '*gauche plurielle*', that which is denouncing most forcefully the effects of economic globalisation, symbolised at the beginning of the film by the inflatable globe drifting towards L'Estaque, the Marseille district where all Guédiguian's films are set. Every single character of the film

⁴⁷ Ludivine Garnaud, 'Réveil du cinéma français', *Regards*, n° 27, September 1997; Guilloux, 'Le cinéma citoyen', *L'Humanité*, 2 January 1998, pp. 16-17.

⁴⁸ Claude Lecomte, 'Robert Guédiguian, un cinéaste avec Marseille au cœur', *L'Humanité*, 19 March 1996, p. 17.

⁴⁹ Guilloux, 'Marseille nourrit de belles illusions', *L'Humanité*, 11 October 1995, p. 22; Breton, 'La morale de la strip-teaseuse', *ibid.*; Le Morvan, 'A la rencontre de la vie', *L'Humanité Dimanche*, n° 291, 12-18 October 1995, p. 62;

⁵⁰ Rémy, 'Le temps de l'amour', *L'Humanité Dimanche*, n° 374, 15-21 May 1997, pp. 72-73; Guilloux, 'Guédiguian sur le corde sensible', *L'Humanité*, 9 May 1997, p. 19; Magali Jauffret, 'Sur le plateau de *Marius et Jeannette*', *ibid.*, pp. 19-20; Jauffret, 'Robert et Ariane', *L'Humanité*, 17 November 1997; Rémy, 'Guédiguian, le cinéma en famille', *L'Humanité Hebdo*, n° 1, 20-26 November 1997, pp. 66-67; Rémy, 'Si Marseille m'était contée', *ibid.*, p. 68; Guilloux, 'Interview with Robert Guédiguian: "Un lutteur qui a retrouvé le sourire"', *L'Humanité*, 20 November 1997, pp. 24-25; Jean-Claude Izzo, '*Marius et Jeannette*, de Guédiguian: tous les rêves du monde', *ibid.*, p. 25.

⁵¹ Michael Temple, '*Marius et Jeannette*', *Sight and Sound*, n° 12, December 1997, p. 46.

is in one way or another a victim of economic liberalism which strikes them out of the blue: Jeannette (Ariane Ascaride) wonders when, where and by whom the decision to close down the cement factory where her father worked and died was taken, adding that 'we can't do anything'. Even M. Ebrard (Pierre Baderet), who as the supermarket manager fires Jeannette, is later seen as a female underwear salesman and ends up as a waiter: globalisation only benefits the very powerful. Moreover the community of mind among those opposing capitalist liberalism, as seen in the previous chapter, is conveyed by the love-story between Caroline (Pascale Roberts) who reads *L'Humanité* and Justin (Jacques Boudet) who reads *Le Monde diplomatique*; both papers, the spectator easily pictures, ending up on each side of Caroline's bed. In a way which recalls Tavernier's anti-American subtext in *L'Appat* (1995), Guédiguian's *Marius et Jeannette* is a filmic representation of the point of view of the opponents of globalisation.⁵²

While Communist critics were particularly pleased with the return of the 'real' and social motifs in young French cinema, they did not limit their applause to films which deliberately lean towards subject-matters so rooted in the real. Their defence of independent cinema encompasses most young directors. Noémie Lvovski, Arnaud Desplechin, Laurence Ferreira-Barbosa, Mathieu Amalric, to name but a few among the young generation of directors who do not tackle social issues specifically, have been welcomed in the Communist press but with less enthusiasm than those who deal with 'the real'. Indeed Jean Roy seems to have grown tired of the portraying of a certain Parisian intelligentsia. His review of Pascal Bonitzer's *Rien sur Robert* (1999) is reminiscent of some of the criticisms directed at the New Wave directors forty years earlier.⁵³ Roy describes the films of Christian Vincent, Éric Rochant, Cédric Khan, Bruno Podalydès, Olivier Assayas or Judith Cahen as peopled by 'forever undecided, half-heartedly angst-ridden left-bank readers of Deleuze and the directors as 'too indulgent with their characters who do not deserve such leniency'.⁵⁴ It is difficult to

⁵² See chapter 7, pp. 283-87. More surprising was the comparison between *Titanic* and Guédiguian or Poirier's films made by Didier Rochet on the ground that they all tell the story of the same revolts, play the card of individual singularity, personal tales and resist the existing order, Rochet, 'Silence, on coule', *L'Humanité Hebdo*, n° 12, 5-11 February 1998, p. 47.

⁵³ See chapter 4.

⁵⁴ Jean Roy, 'Plus souvent petit que grand', *L'Humanité*, 19 February 1999.

make absolute judgements about the Communist reception of independent films. Thus in the first half of 1999 Catherine Breillat's controversial *Romance* (1999) and Jean-Claude Biette's *Trois ponts et une rivière* were both highly praised in *L'Humanité* and *Regards*.⁵⁵

In the 1990s the position of Communist critics regarding independent cinema has been based on economic, thematic and aesthetic criteria. Breton summed it up in February 1999. Breton first refutes the sempiternal moan about the French versus Hollywood/David and Goliath scheme, stressing that 'all *Titanics* are not necessarily American'. Some French films reached the million spectators figure while 'some very fine American films' did not fare well in spite of their qualities. This means, the Communist critic explains, that there are two types of films, the aim of which increasingly differ: 'Some films, targeting their audience's expectations manage to do so through either mind-blowing special effects or facile scenarios and populist acting. The other films are those which are made by directors who wish to say something or to share something (pleasure, emotions) with a spectator they did not know.' Breton opposes films as commercial products 'born out of extensive market research' and films 'born out of desire': love of money against love of cinema.⁵⁶

The fact that the young generation, whatever the relationship of their films to the 'real', has also shown itself prepared to get politically involved is certainly a major factor in the positive Communist reception. Indeed it is this essential aspect of the relationship between French cinema, French society and the PCF today which I shall now address by way of conclusion to the final part of this study.

⁵⁵ Frank Cormerais, 'Le sexe mis à nu', *Regards*, April 1999; Xavier Delrieu, 'Entretien avec Catherine Breillat', *ibid.*, May 1999; Guilloux, 'Rencontre autour de *Romance*', *L'Humanité*, 12 April 1999; Guilloux, 'Une romance singulière', *ibid.*, 14 April 1999; '26 centimètres par seconde', *ibid.*, 17 April 1999; Guilloux, 'Un cinéaste à hauteur d'homme', *ibid.*, 10 April 1999; Didier Rochet, 'Jean-Claude Biette, cinéaste de l'année', *ibid.*, 25 May 1999.

⁵⁶ Émile Breton, 'Tours et détours du cinéma français', *Commune*, n° 13, Ventôse 207 (February 1999), pp. 9-12.

8.3. The PCF and French Cinema on the Eve of a New Millennium: 'We are all Rosettas' but not all Rosettas are Communists.

The Communist defence of independent cinema in critical terms matches its defence in economic and industrial terms. The blending of these two facets was further evidenced at the 1999 Cannes Film Festival. The Communist critics resolutely supported the choice of the jury, presided by David Cronenberg. The controversial decision to reward two auteur films deeply rooted in the real — the *Palme d'or* given to Luc and Jean-Pierre Dardenne's *Rosetta*, the *Grand Prix* to Bruno Dumont's *L'Humanité*, the *Prix d'interprétation féminine* to Émilie Dequenne for *Rosetta* and Sandrine Canele for *L'Humanité* and the *Prix d'interprétation masculine* to Emmanuel Schotté also in Dumont's film — was less than welcomed by the critics as a whole whereas the Communist critics wrote that the jury had welcomed 'a type of social realism in which a subject-matter based on social revolt was matched by a consonant independent form'.⁵⁷ Moreover as Cannes was taking place in the midst of the campaign for the European elections, Claude Cabanes, *L'Humanité*'s editor-in-chief, emphatically underscored the political reading which the Party made of *Rosetta*: 'I vote Robert Hue, I vote Rosetta'.⁵⁸ Four months later, when the film was commercially released, after a(n) (in)famous French pneumatic company announced that it was laying off 6000 workers while advertising huge profits in the same breath, Cabanes wrote: 'We are all Rosettas'.⁵⁹ This seems to indicate a complete harmony between French independent cinema and the PCF. Many such films are enthusiastically supported by the Party's critics and the film policy the PCF advocates echoes almost word for word that of the organisations representing the independent sector. At first sight, it would appear that the PCF's current stance should both restore its prestige in France's cultural circles and serve as a basis for a renewed influence on France's cultural affairs. A closer examination reveals a less optimistic

⁵⁷ Roy, 'Retour sur un palmarès', *L'Humanité*, 25 May 1999.

⁵⁸ Claude Cabanes, *L'Humanité*, 29 May 1999.

⁵⁹ Cabanes, *L'Humanité*, 29 September 1999. Soon after this became the advertising slogan for the film, see appendice 24, p. 414.

perspective for the PCF and indeed leads to questioning its place and role within French culture at the dawn of a new millennium.

8.3.1. A Working-Class Party?

At a time when French auteurs tackle social issues and anchor their films in the real, choosing their heroes in the working class and the underprivileged, it is ironic — and profoundly disturbing for the Party — to see the PCF losing its popular grassroots vote. During the discussions which took place at the National Committee meeting of the PCF following the Party's disappointing results in the European elections, Communist leaders faced the grim truth about their electorate. Alain Bocquet remarked: 'We have a serious problem on our hands regarding the working-class vote with 8 per cent of the workers voting for the PCF, 16 per cent for the PS and 18 per cent for the FN, while 7 per cent of employees voted Communist and 25 per cent voted Socialist.'⁶⁰ These figures, which show that the PCF can no longer claim to be the sole representative of the working class amply confirmed a poll about and for *L'Humanité Hebdo* in 1998. This poll gave the following results: *L'Humanité Hebdo* is read only by 8.2 per cent workers (employees, 17.7 per cent; teachers, 11.6 per cent; technicians and lower-end executives, 20 per cent; professionals, top-end executives, 7 per cent).⁶¹ In other words if for the PCF 'we are all Rosettas', not all Rosettas are or vote Communist.

The new configuration of the PCF's membership and electorate which these figures indicate show the evolution of the Communist critical reception of French cinema under a new light. The dichotomy between auteur cinema and mainstream cinema which existed in the 1960s and 1970s was borne out of the Party's wide social-economic appeal: ranging from the working class to the '*intellectuels engagés*', from *La Grande Vadrouille* to *Othon*. In the 1990s, both the socio-economic composition of the Party's support and its critics' positions seem to be more homogeneous. In recent years a number of observers have raised

⁶⁰ Alain Bocquet, 'Discussion 3', *L'Humanité*, 29 June 1999.

⁶¹ '*L'Humanité Hebdo* tient son pari', *L'Humanité Hebdo*, n° 34, 9-15 July 1998, p. 18.

the issue of the apparent divorce between the critics and the public.⁶² Paradoxically, the Communist press seems to have reduced the gap which existed in the past between some of its critics' positions and those of its readership. Their critical choices correspond to the PCF's positions in terms of auteur cinema and mainstream cinema, or between auteur cinema and producer cinema, to use Daniel Toscan du Plantier's phrase.⁶³ The Communist critics did not get involved in the acrimonious debate about the so-called elitism and unfairness displayed by *Libération*, *Cahiers du cinéma*, *Le Monde* or *Les Inrockuptibles* towards some French directors, including Claude Sautet, Claude Miller and Claude Berri. Yet in 1991, during the polemic between Berri and *Libération*'s film critic Serge Daney, *Les Lettres françaises* praised the latter for the quality of its criticism.⁶⁴ There is no doubt that in the 1990s the increased critical support the PCF gives to independent and auteur cinema is seen by the Party as the illustration of a criticism which is touch with what is happening in the film world, economically, politically and aesthetically, thus answering Bertolucci's call for critics who would accompany the changes which are taking place in cinema, as they did in the 1970s.⁶⁵

The previous chapter has examined the role played by Jack Ralite's *États Généraux de la Culture* in the mobilisation of the film trade for the 'cultural exception' and against the MAI. In the last fifteen years Ralite, a member of the PCF's national Committee, has not only been the spokesman of the PCF on cultural matters, he seems to have become quite literally the embodiment of the PCF's cultural policy with the 'Declaration of Cultural Rights' as his/its programme of intentions. Of all French papers, *L'Humanité* is the only one to report regularly on the activities of the EGCu.⁶⁶ While the PCF makes clear that the EGCu and its

⁶² See Alain Riou, 'Du zéro à l'infini', *Le Nouvel Observateur*, 16 July 1992; Michel Chion, 'Le détail qui tue la critique de cinéma', *Libération*, 22 April 1994, p. 7; Florence Mendel, 'Critique-public: le grand divorce?', *L'Express*, 31 January 1996; Laurent Neumann, 'Critique-public, divorce aux torts partagés', *L'Événement du jeudi*, 29 August-5 September 1996, pp. 84-89.

⁶³ Quoted in Neumann, p. 88.

⁶⁴ 'Trublion', *Les Lettres françaises*, n° 8, April 1991, p. 19.

⁶⁵ Rémy, 'Le cinéaste, le cinéphile, et le critique', *L'Humanité*, 14 May 1997, p. 24.

⁶⁶ See for instance Jean-Pierre Léonardini, 'Un Tour de France en douze étapes', *L'Humanité*, 2 October 1996, p. 21; Léonardini, 'Le Tour de France commence à Saint-Priest', *ibid.*, 11 October 1996, p. 21; Jean Roy, 'Tour de France : étape à Aubervilliers', *ibid.*, 14 October 1996, p. 21; Roy, 'À Brest, c'était du tonnerre', *ibid.*, 28 November 1996, p. 21; Guilloux, 'Le retour de France des États généraux', *ibid.*, 4 February 1997, p. 21.

own views closely match, the EGCu never emphasise this political companionship. Of all accounts Jack Ralite never stresses the closeness of his two commitments, as a Communist and as founder of the EGCu. The success the EGCu have met with within the French art and entertainment sectors seems to rely precisely on their independence from the Party, which in turn has given them their federating strength. Indeed the fact that as a 'renovator' in the late 1980s, Jack Ralite was himself asserting his independence from the Party's leadership also played a role in the appeal of the EGCu. In 1998 the EGCu published a small booklet to mark their tenth anniversary. Out of the seventy-two contributions from numerous French intellectuals and artists, including a majority of non-Communists, the word Communist only appears once and as an adjective qualifying the word 'crimes'.⁶⁷ Rufus, a French actor, wonders whether it is the same Communists, whose crimes are compared to those of the Nazis, who are also committed to the EGCu.⁶⁸ The PCF has acted as the transmission belt of the EGCu without fully benefiting from it in terms of prestige and influence in the French film world. This disconnection illustrates the current position of the PCF and may be seen as an illustration of the difficulties the Party has been experiencing in the late 1990s, difficulties which have been further underscored by *L'appel des 66*.

⁶⁷ Mireille Abadie, actress; Robert Abirached, academic; Francis Aïqui, stage director; Pierre Ascaride, stage director; Liliane Atlan, writer; Micheline and Lucien Attoun, stage directors; Jean-Paul Bachollet, night-time reveller; Guy Béart, singer; Luc Béraud, film director; Francine Bergé, actress; Charles Berling, actor; Jean Bertho, film director; Jeanine Bertrand, film director; Didier Bezace, stage director; Jacques Blanc, stage director; Dominique Borg, costume designer; Jean-Claude Carrière, writer and script-writer; Denise Chalem, actress; Daniel Cling, actor; Yves Clot, philosopher; Dominique Collignon Maurin, actor; Berangère Dautin, actress; Pierre Decazes, actor; Pierre-Henry Deleau, director of FIPA; Richerd Demarcy, auteur and director; Evelyne Dress, actress; Marie Dubois, actress; Serge Rousseau, actor; Pierre Dumayet, writer; Maurice Fallevic, film director; Alain Françon, stage and theatre director; René Gachet, director of DRAC Ile-de-France; Gabriel Garran, dstage and theatre director; Nedim Gürsel, writer; Gisèle Halimi, writer; Robert Hossein, actor, stage and film director; Jacques Krier, film director; Daniel Lefort, trade-unionist; Eduardo Manet, writer; Jean-Pierre Marchand, film director; Jean-Charles Masséra, writer and art critic; Jean Matthyssens, ex-president of the Beaumarchais Foundation; Mado Laurin, actress; Jean-Louis Méchali, musician; Pierre Meige, singer; Jean-Pierre Miquel, actor and stage director; Pius Ngandu Nkashama, writer; Stanislas Nordey, stage and theatre director, Nous travaillons ensemble, graphic designers; Jean-Claude Petit, composer; Michel Piccoli, actor; Claude Piéplu, actor; Roger Planchon, stage and theatre director; Micheline Presle, actress; Melly and Paul Puaux, directors of the Maison Jean Vilar; Maud Rayer, actress; François Regnault, philosopher and writer; Serge Regourd, college professor; Anne-Marie Reynaud, choreographer; Jean-Yves Rochex, university lecturer; Jacques Rouffio, film director; Rufus, actor; Bruno Tackels, philosopher; Arlette Téphany and Pierre Meyrand, stage director, actress and actor; Henri Tisot, actor; Philippe Torreton, actor; Henri Vart, producer; Jacques Vigoureux, film director; Vania Vilers, actor; Jean-Pierre Vincent, stage and theatre director, *Il n'y a d'anniversaire que pour ce qui vit* (Les États généraux de la culture, 1998).

⁶⁸ Rufus, 'Coco... copains', *Il n'y a d'anniversaire que pour ce qui vit*, p. 20.

8.3.2. The PCF, 'l'Appel des 66' and France's *Cinéastes Citoyens*: the Pif syndrome

In February 1997, sixty-six film directors, who for the most part belonged to the new generation of auteurs, signed a petition opposing the Juppé right-wing government policy on immigration. The then Minister for Home Affairs Jean-Louis Debré had put forward a repressive law to combat illegal immigration by which French citizens were obliged to report on illegal immigrants by declaring to the authorities the dates of arrival and departure of any non-European citizens they would have welcomed privately. Thus on 4 February 1997 Jacqueline Delcombe was condemned for having lodged a citizen from Zaire.⁶⁹ A week later, 66 French directors issued the following statement:

We, French directors, declare

We are all guilty, each one of us, of having recently lodged foreigners in breach of the regulations. We have not denounced our foreign friends to the authorities. We will continue lodging them without reporting them to the authorities, befriending and working with colleagues and friends without checking their identities.

Following the court decision of 4 February 1997, which found Madame Jacqueline Delcombe, 'guilty' of having lodged a friend from Zaire who was in breach of the regulations, and following the principle that the law is the same for every citizen, we asked to be judged as well.

Finally we call on our fellow citizens to disobey the law in order not to comply with inhuman laws.

We refuse to see our liberties being infringed in this way.⁷⁰

This manifesto appealing for 'civil disobedience' marked the official entry of French directors into French politics. Almost forty years earlier, *l'Appel des 121*, which originated from the

⁶⁹ E. F., 'Jacqueline: jugée pour 'délit d'amitié', *L'Humanité*, 4 February 1997.

⁷⁰ The sixty-six signatories are: Olivier Assayas, Jacques Audiard, Mathieu Amalric, Pascale Bailly, Éric Barbier, Xavier Beauvois, Lucas Belvaux, Laurent Bénégui, Diane Bertrand, Christophe Blanc, Pascal Bonitzer, Laurent Bouhnik, Catherine Breillat, Judith Cahen, Marc Caro, Patrice Chéreau, Jean-Paul Civeyrac, Alain Corneau, Catherine Corsini, Claire Denis, Arnaud Desplechin, Claire Devers, Karim Dridi, Danièle Dubroux, Martine Dugowson, Philippe Faucon, Pascale Ferran, Laurence Ferreira-Barbosa, Sophie Fillières, Anne Fontaine, Thomas Gilou, Robert Guédiguian, Henri Herré, Bojena Horackova, Cédric Khan, Mathieu Kassovitz, Jacques Kébadian, Cédric Klapisch, Jan Kounen, Jeanne Labrune, Pascal Légitimus, Serge Le Péron, Philippe Lioret, Noémie Lvovsky, Jacques Maillot, Tonie Marshall, Agnès Merlet, Claude Miller, Gérard Mordillat, Gaspar Noé, Agnès Obadia, Nicolas Philibert, Manuel Poirier, Bruno Podalydès, Alain Robbak, Jean-Henri Roger, Jean-Michel Roux, Pierre Salvadori, Claire Simon, Michel Spinoza, Bertrand Tavernier, Tran Anh Hung, Marie Vermillard, Marion Vernoux, Sandrine Veysset and Yolande Zauberman, 'Il faut désobéir à des lois inhumaines', *L'Humanité*, 12 February 1997.

initiative of French left-wing literary figures, was signed by only a handful of directors.⁷¹ In the post-68 era, French directors engaged in politics through their films but hardly ever ventured out of the film world into society at large. The novelty of the 1997 manifesto rested precisely on a new type of *engagement*. The young directors who signed it put forward their position as citizens, who happened to be directors, explicitly marking the difference between their professional and personal personas.⁷² Through their manifesto, they became social and political actors, thus acknowledging that their films alone might no longer constitute an adequate and sufficient means to engage efficiently with the world.⁷³

While the manifesto questioned the relationship between the young French auteurs and left-wing political parties, it should also be examined in the wider context of the new configuration of the French Left. Since the beginning of the 1990s, there has been a multiplication of organisations which, while being on the Left, have refused to be linked with political parties. This '*mouvement social*', ranging from associations for the unemployed to support groups for immigrants in breach of regulations has become a feature of the French socio-political landscape. It partly stemmed from a disillusionment with traditional political parties, not least the French Communist Party. Thus many directors who spoke in the name of the manifesto underlined that their initiative came out of the perception that no one else was ready to take it. Bertrand Tavernier talked about this intrusion of directors in French politics: 'I am a film-maker, not a politician. As film makers we should not be doing this job. We are not paid to do it, we are not elected to do it. In the past artists became angry about certain issues. But this is different, people are beginning to count on us to do this job.'⁷⁴ Similarly, speaking in the name of the BLOC, Robert Guédiguian, Jean-Henri Roger and Nicolas Philibert declared: 'We soon understood that politicians no longer believed in politics. So,

⁷¹ See chapter 4, p. 161.

⁷² See Ginette Vincendeau, 'Black to the Blackboard', *Sight and Sound*, n° 7, July 1999, pp. 12-15. Vincendeau explains how Tavernier's 1990s films should be looked at 'in the context of the growing body of work by younger French directors who address the current '*fracture sociale*', the social rift between the haves and the have-nots produced by advanced capitalism', p. 13.

⁷³ On *l'Appel des 66*, see also Jean-Pierre Jeancolas, 'Une bobine d'avance, du cinéma et de la politique en février 1997', *Positif*, n° 434, April 1997, pp. 56-58 and 'Un cinéma de la responsabilité: esquisse de cartographie du cinéma français vivant en 1998', *Australian Journal of French Studies*, Vol. XXXVI, 1 (January-April 1999), pp. 12-25 (16-17).

⁷⁴ In Peter Lennon, 'A Man of Action', *The Irish Times*, 31 July 1999, Weekend Supplement, p. 5.

who would get involved in politics, if we don't?"⁷⁵ In this light, *l'Appel des 66* illustrated not only the French directors' solidarity with immigrants, who, as '*exclus*', are also victims of the '*fracture sociale*' but also a '*fracture politique*', i.e. a political rift between left-wing political parties and left-wing citizens.

While the PCF supported the directors' manifesto, the directors questioned the current efficiency of the Party.⁷⁶ Answering Zoë Lin who mentioned to him that the PCF and anti-racist organisations were also fighting the Pasqua-Debré laws, Cédric Klapisch noted that it took four days for Robert Hue to express his sympathy with the manifesto and bluntly underlined how he saw the PCF's current position: 'When I say that this law is inhuman because it considers that a foreigner is not a human being, I say something simple that everyone can understand. But it does not come out as strong when a Communist says it because he has not got the credibility that I have — which is a serious issue — because of Stalinism.'⁷⁷ Echoing Klapisch, the actor Philippe Caubère questioned the very existence of the PCF at the turn of the century: 'Let us not hide the truth: the Communist idea in the 20th century has been a dreadful failure, for millions of people the Communist dream turned into a nightmare. So since I am writing in a Communist paper — and if this text is published — the only questions I can ask its readers is "How do you remain Communist?" and "How can you?"'⁷⁸ For Guédiguian, making films was a way to remain politically active. He made his first film, *Dernier Été* (1980), after leaving the PCF.⁷⁹

The uneasy situation of the PCF in 1999 — as both a party of government and a party which claims to represent the interest of the have-nots — was illustrated recently by the

⁷⁵ 'Moral à trois', *La Lettre de la SRF*, n° 63, December 1998, p. 3.

⁷⁶ See Guilloux, 'Ces cinéastes qui ne veulent pas devenir des auxiliaires de police', *L'Humanité*, 13 February 1997; 'Sans-papiers et cinéastes: une réaction de Patrick Braouezec', *ibid.*; Guilloux, 'Questions à Aline Pailler', *ibid.*; Jean-Pierre Léonardini, 'Dignité civique', *ibid.*, 14 February 1997; 'Après les cinéastes, 161 écrivains appellent à la désobéissance civile', *ibid.*; Guilloux, 'Ils désobéissent à une loi inique: la jeune vague du cinéma en fait de nouvelles', *ibid.*, 15 February 1997, pp. 4-5; Claude Marchand, 'La vague de contestations du projet Debré sera dans les rues de Paris samedi', 19 February 1997, p. 3; Lin, 'Interview with Gérard Mordillat: "Nous irons à la manif"', *ibid.*, p. 4; Pierre Agudo, 'La puissance du souffle de voix plurielles contre le projet Debré', *ibid.*, 21 February 1997, p. 3.

⁷⁷ Zoë Lin, 'Interview with Cédric Klapisch: "Nous n'obéirons pas à une loi inhumaine"', *L'Humanité*, 21 February 1997, pp. 4-5.

⁷⁸ Philippe Caubère, 'Comment pouvez-vous être encore communiste?', *L'Humanité*, 10 March, pp. 12-13.

⁷⁹ Vigo, 'Entretien avec Robert Guédiguian', *Regards*, November 1997.

Communist reception of Tavernier's latest film. *Ça commence aujourd'hui* (1999) is set in a deprived town in Northern France and describes the difficulties experienced on a daily basis by a primary school headmaster and his colleagues in dealing with economically-impaired pupils and parents. Among the authorities Daniel (Philippe Torreton) fights with is the Communist mayor (*L'Humanité* can be seen on his desk). The very positive reception given to the film by the Communist press is characteristic of the current ambivalent Communist stance: happy and proud to be in government and frustrated because it cannot deliver the goods.⁸⁰

Klapisch's and Caubère's statements as well as Tavernier's film are illustrations of the difficulties the PCF is experiencing at the end of 1990s. No longer the main rallying point, the PCF has become just one organisation among many; yet one which is carrying a specific national and international history. As it prepares for its first 21st century Congress, the PCF is working very hard to remain relevant in the new millennium. On 16 October 1999 it organised a large and successful demonstration against economic liberalism and unemployment which nevertheless did not receive the support of all the organisations involved in the movement against the '*fracture sociale*'. On 22 October, the *Amis de L'Humanité* organised a meeting between directors (Robert Guédiguian, Gérard Mordillat, Gérard Guérin, Cédric Klapisch, Pascal Thomas, Marion Vernoux) and farmers (including José Bové), both sectors engaged in the battle against the consequences of globalisation.⁸¹

⁸⁰ Roy, 'The school of the Republic', *L'Humanité*, 12 March 1999, pp. 17-18.

⁸¹ See 'Rencontre Paysans-cinéastes au Larzac', *L'Humanité*, 6 October 1999; Gérard Guérin, Gérard Mordillat, Robert Guédiguian, *ibid.*, 16 October 1999; Charles Sylvestre, 'Des cinéastes qui n'en démordent pas', *ibid.*, 20 October 1999; Guilloux, 'De l'un de nos envoyés spéciaux au Larzac', Jean-Henri Roger and Pascal Thomas, *ibid.*, 25 October 1999. José Bové spent three weeks in prison for attacking a McDonald restaurant in Millau (Aveyron) in Summer 1999. He was a guest star at the 1999 Fête de l'Humanité. Previous meetings between film professionals and trade unionists had taken place under the aegis of the *Amis de l'Humanité*, see Lin and Dominique Widemann, 'Cinéastes et syndicalistes au même générique', *L'Humanité*, 30 April 1997, pp. 24-25; the personalities present included Arnaud Desplechin, Pascale Ferran, Robert Guédiguian, Tonie Marshall, Marion Vernoux, Jacques Audiard, Serge Le Péron, Claire Simon, Judith Cahen, Jacques Henri-Roger, René Vautier, Bernard Lubat, Ernest Pignon-Ernest, Christophe Adriani (responsible for the PCF film commission), Bernard Thibault (CGT railworkers union), Manuel De Almeida (CGT Renault Cléon), Bruno Dalberto (CFDT railworkers union). *L'Humanité* of 22 April 1997 advertised the meeting and mentioned that a meeting had taken place on 1 May 1996 between the leaders of the railworkers strike, artists, intellectuals and journalists.

The ultimate bitter-sweet irony of the relationship between the PCF and French cinema in the 1990s rests on the discrepancy between the PCF's relentless involvement in film matters and the representation of French Communists in French cinema. As French cinema is answering the PCF's long-standing call for a cinema anchored in the 'real' and the PCF's vision of cinema is coming on a par with the vision shared by the young generation of auteurs, the PCF itself is represented by these directors in a nostalgic fashion. Thus, the Communist characters the young directors have recently been portraying are often parents (Rochant's *Un Monde sans pitié* (1989), Masson's *En avoir (ou pas)* (1995). In *La Haine*, when Kassovitz inserts a brief reference to Pif and Hercule, two heroes of the eponymous comics published by the PCF between 1945 and the 1980s, it is as a reference to the bygone 'trouble-free' era when the PCF almost single-handedly ruled the 'red belt' of Paris.⁸² In *Marius et Jeannette*, Caroline is a middle-aged Communist who refers several times to her imprisonment in German camps during World War 2 and also praises Cuba and the USSR, which once again links the PCF to its past rather than to its current situation or activity. While Jean-Jacques Zilbermann's *Tout le monde n'a pas eu la chance d'avoir des parents communistes* (1994) and Mordillat's *Vive la Sociale* (1984) rely almost exclusively on nostalgia, Rochant and Jeanne Balibar recall the *Fête de L'Humanité* as belonging to a former period of their lives.⁸³

For the foreseeable future, The PCF may have to sustain this phenomenon and come to terms with the fact that, in spite of its transformation and democratisation, for many of the young auteurs, as for a majority of French people, their representation of the PCF is tinted by the Party's past history rather than its actual state, although film professionals acknowledge its continuous and keen support. To be seen as a relevant party for the 21st century is the PCF's main challenge in the French film world as well as in France at large.

⁸² First published as a clandestine Resistance journal, *Vaillant le journal de Pif* became *Pif-gadget* in March 1969; its average circulation was between 600 000 and 700 000.

⁸³ Guilloux, 'Éric Rochant se pose des questions sur la politique', *L'Humanité*, 5 November 1997.

Conclusion

In *La Projection nationale*, Jean-Michel Frodon wonders why the French Communist Party did not venture into film production in spite of its influence in the film industry.¹ The close examination of the relationship between French cinema and the French Communist Party which has been carried out in this dissertation does in fact provide an answer to Frodon's question. Throughout the second half of the twentieth century the PCF has shown a sustained interest in the welfare of French cinema. Yet the Party has not left its own particular mark on the considerable film production of the period (about 5000 films), nor has it been at any time in the position of turning French films into instruments of propaganda. After examining the links between the PCF and French cinema, it seems clear that not only was the Party unable to do so, but in addition it does not seem that this was ever its intention.

With regard to film policy, the PCF was never in a position to decide on the organisation, structure and future of French cinema. The only period when the PCF was partly in control of the industry was in the few months which followed the liberation of Paris, but in spite of extensive popular and electoral support, the PCF had to share power with other parties and very early lost the initiative in matters relating to French cinema as well as to the rest of the country's affairs. The Cold War, which banned the PCF's access to government for many years, established the oppositional role of the Party. From then on, the PCF would criticise the film policy followed by successive Fourth and Fifth Republic governments, put forward its own proposals and advocate a series of measures calling for the protection of the French film industry. Indeed the PCF has been the most outspoken of all French political parties with regard to cinema, and was backed up by the powerful *Fédération du Spectacle* CGT, with which it has had close links since the formation of the trade union.

Keeping a close watch on the situation of the film industry, the PCF has always been at the forefront of the initiatives taken by the film trade in order to protect its interests when the film sector was deemed in danger, a regular occurrence over the period under scrutiny. For French Communists, the mobilisation in 1993 of France's film professionals in favour of 'cultural exception' — or 'cultural diversity', as it is

¹ Jean-Michel Frodon, *La Projection nationale* (Paris: 1998), pp. 99-100.

commonly referred to since Autumn 1999 — is merely the latest illustration of the combative spirit which the trade has been showing, with the backing of the PCF, since the Liberation.² According to the Communists, if French cinema has been able to retain such a high profile in spite of unrelenting international competition and numerous home-based crises, it is thanks to its capacity to protest, react and organise itself when need arises. Thus according to the PCF, the battle against the Blum-Byrnes agreements marked the realisation by the industry that it had fought and argued, as it would have to again and again with the State if it wanted to obtain protective measures.³

The last fifty years therefore can be looked at in two ways. On the one hand, the film trade is seen as having had to struggle tirelessly for every improvement of its situation. This is a view shared, and promoted, by French Communists. On the other, a series of governmental initiatives to protect the industry have shown the French State's constant awareness of the importance of its film industry and production. Thus, as has been shown in the first chapter, for the PCF, the creation of the CNC is the direct result of the trade's mobilisation, whereas for other historians, it is the mark of the French state's caring attitude towards its national film production.⁴ The latter approach has been put forward by historians who, while rejecting the importance of the battle against the Blum-Byrnes agreements, have criticised the PCF's propagandistic and ideological motives, or minimised its involvement in the ongoing debate on the situation and future of French film.⁵

There is little doubt that the PCF's interest in film matters had a propagandistic dimension.⁶ Its numerous campaigns for the defence of French cinema were always

² See Émile Breton, 'Tours et détours du cinéma français', *Commune*, n° 13, Ventôse 207 (February 1999), pp. 9-12.

³ A point of view confirmed as early as June 1946 by Louis Daquin who explained that the agreements offered the advantage of uniting members of the film industry and gave them for the first time the opportunity to be heard by a member of the government, in 'Le quota. M. Léon Blum explique les accords franco-américains', *La Cinématographie française*, n° 1163, 29 June 1946, pp. 5-6.

⁴ Philippe d'Hugues's opinion lies somewhere in the middle: he considers for instance that the *loi d'aide temporaire* was the government's solution to seize the issue from a dangerous Communist hold. See Philippe d'Hugues, *L'Envahisseur américain - Hollywood contre Billancourt* (Lausanne: Favre, 1999), p. 62.

⁵ See chapter 1, pp. 64-66. See also Jeancolas, 'From the Blum-Byrne Agreements to the GATT affair', in *Hollywood and Europe*, ed. by Geoffrey Nowell-Smith and Stephen Ricci (London: BFI, 1998): 'The mobilisation for the defence of French cinema, which reached its peak in the last years of the 1940s, was, therefore, more a political than an economic or artistic matter', p. 52. For his part, d'Hugues does not mention Jack Ralite or Aline Pailler on the chapters dealing with the 1990s.

⁶ See for instance the Peace Movement campaign, chapter 1, pp. 69-70.

accompanied by attacks on governments and denunciations of the capitalist system. Two issues arise from this. Firstly, whether the film sector would be better off now if it had not always reacted so promptly when it *felt* necessary to do so, to a large extent spearheaded by the Communists or not, and secondly whether the PCF benefited politically from this involvement in French film issues.

It is difficult to give a definite answer to the first question. But I hope to have shown that the PCF had a key role in the mobilisation of the film profession. The reaction to the Blum-Byrnes agreements as well as the reaction to the *Cinémathèque* affair or against MAI showed the public authorities the strength of the French film industry. The organisational skills of the *Fédération du Spectacle* were an asset to the trade. That a political party was ready to relay most of the claims of the film trade's workforce was not to be scorned. In other words, it seems that the French film sector benefited from the PCF's and its related trade-union's involvement in its affairs insofar as they helped to create and maintain among film professionals a sense of unity and common purpose which may have fluctuated with time but which has proved very effective right up to the very last days of the twentieth century.⁷

It seems somehow easier to give a straight answer to the second question. The PCF does not seem to have been able to capitalise politically and ideologically on its popularity within the film industry. Explanations for this deficiency can be drawn from the examination of the French Communist critical reception of French cinema since the Second World War. It has taken the PCF most of the period investigated to come to a united position on French cinema. Only in the late 1990s has the Party shown an homogeneous viewpoint in unison with the majority of French film auteurs. The way the PCF's position on the concept of auteur evolved over the second half of the century is crucial to understanding why so few film directors have echoed the Communist viewpoint in their films. Thus from the late 1940s to the late 1950s, the PCF advocated New Realism as a French version of Socialist Realism, privileging content over form and asking artists and intellectuals to apply *l'esprit de parti* to their work. Denying cultural creators their freedom, the PCF alienated many film directors. The PCF's defence of the

⁷ See for instance, the fiasco of the WTO's meeting in Seattle in November 1999.

film industry was welcome, but only a very small number of French directors followed the PCF consistently during these Stalinist years. At stake was the absolute impossibility of reconciling the principles of Socialist Realism with the notion of auteur. This is one obvious reason explaining why the PCF did not become a big film producer in the 1950s. French directors were well aware of the dangers posed by Zhdanovism. Even fellow-travellers like Grémillon stuck to their personal auteurist credo. Although the Party was defending Zhdanovism in theory, and in spite of the lack of appeal of New Realism to the great majority of French directors, the PCF ended up defending the bulk of French film production between 1945 and 1958. The PCF never pilloried a French film for not applying the strict rules of New Realism. Had they wanted to, the Communists would have had to pillory most of the film production between 1947 and 1958. Instead, practising a kind of French Communist McCarthyism, they picked on a few auteurs as scapegoats, looking for their so-called 'anti-French activities', which ranged from formalism to homosexuality. In fact ideological denunciations were in their great majority targeted at Hollywood cinema, which represented for the PCF an ideological and an economic enemy. By stressing the American threat, the PCF was able to defend French cinema because it was French. The discourse on the defence of national culture inaugurated by Aragon before the Second World War regained momentum after the Liberation since, according to the PCF rhetoric, foreign powers — fascist Germany, capitalist USA — successively aimed to bring France under their control and the country's cultural production and heritage had to be defended against American 'capitalist imperialism' and French cultural production had now to be defended against American 'capitalist imperialism'. The defence of French film as part of France's national culture became central to the PCF's stance on cinema.

Both the implicit acknowledgement of the failure of Socialist Realism and the emergence of the New Wave led to a change in the critics' discourse. The globally positive reception of the young generation of film directors and their innovative films allowed Sadoul and an equally new generation of film critics to throw away the heavy corset of dogmatism and embrace formalism as an essential feature of the filmic art-form. Yet this new critical position triggered a hostile reaction from Communist film

professionals for whom the New Wave endangered the gains obtained in the previous years. The reception of the New Wave exemplified the contradictions and difficulties of the Communist position. While its opponents claimed that the New Wave endangered the welfare of the film industry and therefore the renown of French cinema, its advocates praised it as a national film trend, setting the new directors firmly within France's national culture. Thus some Communists were accusing the new auteurs of damaging the prestige of French cinema while others considered that they were advancing France's cultural heritage. This dichotomous Communist position — critics on one side, film professionals on another — might have fluctuated with time but remained a reality until the mid-1990s. Communist critics were not only criticised from within the Party, they also faced criticism from the left of the Party. For the critics who considered the New Wave a reactionary movement, the PCF's critical discourse simply moved from Stalinism to right-wingism. For these, who mostly belonged to *Positif's* editorial team, French Communist critics had never defined or followed a truly Marxist position, but instead had become bogged down in their national discourse to the detriment of their original materialist ideology.⁸ During the New Wave, few of the new directors were close to the PCF. Those who were more politically engaged, mostly as a result of their opposition to the Algerian war, held the PCF in poor esteem. This was both a consequence of disillusionment with the Eastern Communist model following the revelations of the 'Khrushchev report' and the invasion of Hungary in 1956, and a reaction to the Party's stance on the Algerian question. Although the Communist critics supported the New Wave, hardly any films between 1958 and 1963 echoed the PCF's stance during the period.

Ironically, the recognition of the concept of auteur, implicit in the conclusions of the Argenteuil Central Committee, coincided with the first denunciations of auteurism as a bourgeois concept by critics inspired by Marxist principles. In the aftermath of May '68 politics made its explicit entry into French cinema, be it mainstream, marginal or militant, and the ideology of film became a key issue in the theoretical arena. The different trends of Marxism all participated in an often obscure debate, trying to determine what would

⁸ See Jean Domarchi, 'Le fer dans la plaie', *Cahiers du cinéma*, n° 63, October 1956, pp. 18-28.

constitute a truly materialist film practice. Outflanked on its left, the PCF became the butt of far left criticism, for which the Party had lost its Marxist-Leninist credentials. While Communist critics tried to repel these attacks, they also had to struggle within the Party against an 'economist vision of the filmic art-form'.⁹ The national factor continued to weigh heavily on the Communist discourse regarding French film. The few Communist auteurs and the critics involved in contemporary theoretical debate complained about the lack of understanding from Communist film personnel.

It is only towards the end of the 1990s that Communist film personnel and Communist critics together fully embraced auteur cinema in both economic and aesthetic terms, speaking in one voice in defence of independent cinema. But in that later period too, it would be difficult to say that the PCF drew any benefit from the defence of auteurs. The views defended by Jack Ralite and his *États Généraux de la Culture* — which in fact became the PCF's cultural policy by default — foreshadowed the views advocated by most during the GATT and the MAI negotiations. First they were expressed at a time when the PCF was experiencing a serious decline in popularity and influence. Then, from the mid-1990s, they were echoed by so many similar opinions, mostly but not exclusively from the French Left, that the PCF's own stance was somewhat lost in a broadly-based anti-globalisation chorus. Moreover, as the PCF pledged to support French auteurs, the latter considered the Party more as a thing of the past than as an organisation to which they felt very close or which could be relevant for their future.

Independence has become *the* key word in the French Communist discourse on film. Independence with regard to the film industry and the world economy, independence of the critics with regard to international production and — this is a novelty — with regard to national production. The emphasis is no longer on the value of French cinema because it is French, but because it is diverse, iconoclastic and independent. Until the early 1990s, the concept of French cinema was fiercely and often aggressively defended, its superiority over other European productions, not to mention Hollywood, considered undeniable. In the last months of 1999, the very definition of a French cinema was questioned by Communist critics: 'If "cinema" as such can be defined, it is more difficult

⁹ Émile Breton, Interview of 30 July 1998, Paris.

to define “French cinema”. This is because French cinema — and this must be read as a positive sign in creative terms — is far too varied to be categorised under a single national label, not to say a nationalist one.’¹⁰ This declaration was part of the Communist reaction to the controversy which opposed a number of French directors to a number of critics in the last months of 1999. First accused by director Patrice Leconte, some French critics were blamed for deliberately attacking French cinema and for betraying their function by employing unethical methods. Although not accused themselves of such malpractice, Communist critics defended their peers wholeheartedly, refusing the directors’ proposal of adopting a different and more positive attitude towards French cinema as a principle.¹¹ This reaction was a far cry from Louis Daquin’s denunciations of the critics in the 1950s.¹²

This dramatic change in the discourse of the PCF on French cinema cannot be looked at in isolation. Independence is a concept of enormous importance to the PCF itself as much as for the perception one has of the PCF. Between 1944 and 1999, only twice can the PCF be said to have been in a position of relative independence: in the two and a half years which followed the Liberation and since the collapse of European Communism. Between these two periods, the links between the PCF and the Soviet-controlled international Communist movement were constant if of varying degrees of closeness. Between the second half of 1947 and the demise of the USSR in 1991, the PCF was both pursuing its national agenda and ‘on the whole’ voicing its support of the Soviet big brother. The PCF’s nationalist and anti-European stance must be seen therefore in the light of the Party’s international connections. The defence of France’s national culture and independence was intimately linked to the PCF’s dependence on international communism; it was part and parcel of the Cold War rhetoric in its initial as well as its subsequent phases. The sternly anti-European dimension of the PCF for most of the

¹⁰ Guilloux & Roy, ‘Les cinéastes de l’ARP tournent la page’, *L’Humanité*, 10 December 1999.

¹¹ See also Guilloux, ‘Critique et cinéma: l’air du soupçon’, *L’Humanité*, 13 November 1999; Roy, ‘Manifestement mal à l’aise’, *ibid.*, 26 November 1999; Guilloux, ‘Pour un vrai débat cinéastes et critiques’, *ibid.*, 8 December 1999; ‘Le manifeste des réalisateurs en colère: “Nous, cinéastes...”’, *Libération*, 25 November 1999, pp. 33-36; ‘Nous aussi, cinéastes...’, *Libération*, 4-5 December 1999. This controversy is not the first one of its kind, see Pierre Coublanc, ‘Au moment où le cinéma français cherche à reconquérir son public, la critique vide les salles’, *France-Film-International*, n° 1, January-February 1960, pp. 1 & 4; ‘Un ancien critique de cinéma devenu producteur accusé de vouloir faire pendre les critiques!’, *France-Film-International*, n° 4, August 1960, pp. 1 & 4.

¹² See chapter 2, p. 113.

period investigated cannot be understood solely in reference to its specific national agenda but must also be seen in relation to the division of Europe into two antagonistic ideological blocks. Western Europe was seen as pro-American, and only the defence of national independence figured prominently on the Communist agenda. The PCF's emphasis on the welfare of France's industries — *Produire français* — was dependent on this international cleft, and applied to film as to other industrial sectors.

It is as if in the 1990s the PCF found in the situation of independent cinema a parallel to its own situation. At every level of the industry — production, distribution, exhibition — the independent film sector is fighting against international companies which are, according to its views, promoting industrial concentration and hence jeopardising cinema's freedom of creation, independence and diversity. In the eyes of the Party, the marginalised position of independent French production echoed its own marginalisation on the political scene. No longer the leading party of the anti-capitalist movement at the end of the century, the PCF has shown an interest in the far left, with which it now has contacts, discovered the value of Europe, and experienced a kind of new-born internationalism in view of the global movement against economic liberalism. At the beginning of the 1980s, the collapse of Communism led to a world in which everyone seemed to take for granted that Capitalism would rule the planet single-handedly and unchecked. Yet at the end of the 1990s the world seemed to react against this single-lane future. The PCF is now only one voice among many in the anti-economic liberalism or anti-American hegemony chorus. It would be difficult to find a member of the PCF who would disagree with Joëlle Farchy when she writes: 'American cultural hegemony is nothing other than a reflection of the USA's geopolitical, economic and military hegemony. Cultural liberalism is nothing other than a reflection of the economic liberalism which reigns over every single sector of activity. It is the very principle of these developments which either must be accepted or fought against in the building of a cultural and political Europe which would be an alternative to the American model. A hypothetical "exception" defended in isolated and corporatist manner by the artistic milieu alone can only fail in the long term.'¹³ It seems nevertheless that the Party's campaigns

¹³ Joëlle Farchy, *La fin de l'exception culturelle?* (Paris: CNRS Éditions, 1999), pp. 241-42.

for the defence of independent cinema, both national and international, have played a part in the PCF's realisation of the limits of an overly narrow national viewpoint.

Since 1945, the PCF has certainly played its part in the preservation of French cinema and has in fact every reason to be pleased with the film policy it has defended. In the aftermath of the Liberation, the Party's calls for the nationalisation of the film industry were short-lived and had hardly any chance of being answered. But the rest of the proposals supported by the Communist Party and organisations close to it met with a better fate. When one looks at the PCF's involvement in film from this perspective, the conclusion one might draw is that the PCF was extremely successful insofar as its recommendations for the reorganisation and future of French cinema have actually been put into effect. In the very early days of the Liberation the CLCF 'expressed a wish for the State to show more concern for the cinema', and its members were 'ready to place the future of French cinema in the hands of the government and the professionals'.¹⁴ One simply needs to look at the list of measures advocated by the CLCF in October 1944 and compare it to the current organisation of French cinema to see that a majority of them have since been implemented.¹⁵ The CNC is the inter-professional film board the CLCF called for, the professional cards are still in place in spite of several debates surrounding them.¹⁶ The question of intellectual ownership remains a vexed issue in the context of globalisation and in view of the development of new technologies.¹⁷ The FEMIS is a distinguished and world-renowned film school. In spite of a troubled existence, thanks to the State, the *Cinémathèque française* continues to be one of the most revered centres of French and international film culture.¹⁸ The different systems of financial aid have allowed French film production to remain at a high level.¹⁹ The role of Unifrance is to promote French cinema abroad and can therefore be seen as the propaganda office for French cinema which the CLCF wished to see set up and funded by the State, and film professionals sit on the Censorship Board. The implementation of these measures and proposals did not occur at once but the situation of French cinema in 2000 — both

¹⁴ See chapter 1, p. 39.

¹⁵ Ibid.

¹⁶ See chapter 5, pp. 178-85 & 207.

¹⁷ See chapter 7, pp. 284-85.

¹⁸ See chapter 5, pp. 190-95.

¹⁹ See chapters 1, 3, 5 & 7.

healthy and fragile — owes much to them.²⁰ The PCF has been closely involved in that unique blend of state involvement in film matters and professional resilience in the face of foreign competition which has defined French cinema for most of the period examined here.²¹

Although the dogmatic excesses of Communist criticism during the Cold War ended early with the recognition of the New Wave auteurs, they had a profound and lasting effect on perceptions of Communist criticism. Georges Sadoul's renown originated mostly in his seminal work as a film historian rather than critic. Indeed the fact that even someone as knowledgeable and respected as Georges Sadoul went down the Stalinist road is a measure of the strength of the Party's ideological power over its members at the time. In the 1960s and 1970s film critics were often ahead of the Party as a whole in matters concerning the independent sector or the notion of auteur. They were also sometimes at odds with the Party's own readership, in particular in relation to mainstream entertainment cinema, although this remark applies to non-Communist critics as well. The post-May '68 period constitutes the high point of the Communist critics' involvement in the critical reflection which took place among Marxist film writers, with *La Nouvelle Critique* making a considerable contribution to the debate.

In critical terms as well, the PCF has reason to be pleased with late-1990s French cinema. A number of films have finally answered the critics' calls for films which would be popular, socially aware and rooted in the life of ordinary citizens.²² In the 1950s such preference was marked by Zhdanovism, anti-auteurism and anti-formalism. In the late 1990s, it went hand in hand with the defence of independent auteurs. In effect, had the PCF been in a position to produce films in the late 1990s, the films it would have financed would probably resemble many of the current production. A number of independent films, including *Marion*, *Rosetta*, and *Marius et Jeannette*, echoed very

²⁰ Following 1998's disappointing results, market share figures for French films have gone back over the 30 per cent threshold in 1999 but are still below those of 1997. Overall viewing figures are down from 1998 with 155 400 000 spectators — 1998 was the year of *Titanic*'s massive hit —, but up from 1997 by 4.3 percent, in 'Bilan "très honorable" pour le cinéma français', *Libération*, 7 January 2000.

²¹ French cinema has somewhat turned into a model of resistance for other foreign industries — see Maja Zoltowska, 'Le cinéma polonais déclare la guerre à Hollywood', *Libération*, 21 December 1999, p. 45.

²² See Guilloux & Roy, 'Les cinéastes de l'ARP tournent la page', *L'Humanité*, 10 December 1999. See for instance Laurent Cantet's *Ressources humaines*, released in January 2000.

closely the views expressed by the PCF during the same period.²³ Indeed the way Communist characters have been portrayed in French films over the period examined in this dissertation would constitute a logical and worthwhile future field of research.

Yet looking at the declarations of independent directors or at the way they portrayed Communist characters in their films, one is struck by the fact that, in their minds, the PCF does not seem fully relevant to the late twentieth century or the early twenty-first. While the PCF is now independent from the influence of failed foreign models, it has so far failed to shake off its own past. The Party's dogmatism and *langue de bois* — characteristic of most of the period — has left an indelible mark on the PCF. Robert Hue acknowledged this in relation to Eastern Communism when he stated in June 1999 that one of the issues the PCF still found difficult to deal with was its past in the shadow of Eastern Communism: 'I consider that we have not fully appreciated the extent of the marks left by the assimilation of our Communist project with what happened in Eastern Europe in the name of Communism over many years.'²⁴ The PCF leader should probably also include in the causes of uneasiness with the Party — in particular among cultural producers and intellectuals — the PCF's positions with regard to a number of national issues over the second half of the twentieth century, such as the Algerian War, May '68 or foreign immigration in the 1980s. Respected for its support of the film industry and of film personnel, the PCF was not and will never be able to translate its popularity within the French film world onto a wider political and ideological level because of this troubled national and international past.

Unlike its Italian counterpart, the PCF cannot rely on a Nanni Moretti to record on film the Party's transformation and the numerous questions, debates, and heated discussions to which this transformation has given rise.²⁵ Whether such a record might document either the disappearance of the PCF as we have known it for almost a hundred years or its transformation into a new organisation remains an open question for the new century. While no one can bet on the existence of the French Communist Party in 2050, the

²³ See for instance Laurent Cantet's *Ressources humaines*, released in January 2000.

²⁴ Robert Hue, 'Intervention au Comité national, 14 June 1999', *L'Humanité*, 29 June 1999.

²⁵ See Émile Breton, 'La Chose et les hommes', *L'Humanité*, 6 October 1999. The first congress of the PCF in the 21st century takes place in March and will be marked by the discussion between the advocates of change and the 'traditionalists'.

French film industry, unlike the Italian one, seems somehow more assured of its future. There is a strong likelihood that, whatever happens, French film will feature the PCF in one form or another for many years to come. In view of the Party's involvement in French cinema over the last fifty years, it would only be fair to grant the PCF this 'fictional afterlife'.

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29-11-95

Cher Monsieur,

Veuillez excuser cette réponse succincte et laconique, mais je suis en voyage ! Par ailleurs je crains de n'avoir pas grand-chose à vous dire qui puisse enrichir votre enquête.

Incuntablement, le parti communiste a été le plus ardent défenseur du cinéma français à cette époque. À la chambre des députés, une seule voix plaçait des menaces de sanction : celle du député Grenier. L'Association France-U.R.S.S., de son côté, tentait le rapprochement. J'ai moi-même tenu un plus (Normandie-Normandie) qui a été la première co-production avec l'U.R.S.S. Le Syndicat des Techniciens, sous la présidence de Louis Saguis, qui ne cachait pas son appartenance au Parti communiste, prenait une part active à la défense du personnel cinématographique auprès des producteurs. Parallèlement mais sans appartenance politique, la Société des Auteurs Dramatiques avait une commission "L'Association des auteurs de films", dissoute depuis, et qui a poursuivi les mêmes buts sous le sigle S.R.F. (Société des Rédacteurs de Films) menant un combat virulent pour que soient reconnus les droits des auteurs. Sans ces combats,

les auteurs de films seraient augmentés ~~de~~
 des salaires, ~~et~~ ~~de~~ ~~la~~ ~~même~~ ~~manière~~
~~employés~~ au service des Producteurs américains
 aux Etats-Unis sont auteurs de films!
 Les grands réalisateurs américains arrivent
 maintenant à employer nos méthodes
 pour une plus grande indépendance de
 création.

Encore une fois, examinez ces
 "pattes de mouche" et croyez, cher
 monsieur, à mes sentiments les plus
 cordiaux

J. Freyille

Cher Monsieur,

Veillez excuser cette réponse succincte et hâtive, mais je pars en voyage! Par ailleurs je crains n'avoir pas grandchose à vous dire qui puisse enrichir votre enquête.

Incontestablement, le parti communiste a été le plus actif défenseur du cinéma français à cette époque. A la chambre des Députés, une seule voix plaidait des mesures de sauvegarde, celle du député Grenier. L'association France-URSS, de son côté, tentait le rapprochement. J'ai moi-même tourné un film (Normandie-Niemen) qui a été la première co-production avec l'URSS. Le Syndicat des Techniciens, sous la présidence de Louis Daquin, qui ne cachait pas son appartenance au Parti Communiste, prenait une part active à la défense du personnel cinématographique auprès des Producteurs. Parallèlement, mais sans appartenance politique, la Société des Auteurs Dramatiques avait une commission "L'association des Auteurs de Films", dissoute depuis, et qui a poursuivi les mêmes buts sous le sigle SRF (Société des Réalisateurs de Films) menait un combat virulent pour que soient reconnus les droits des auteurs. Sans ces combats, les auteurs de films seraient aujourd'hui des salariés au service du producteur comme aux États-Unis seul auteur du film! Les grands réalisateurs américains arrivent maintenant à employer nos méthodes pour une plus grande indépendance de création.

Encore une fois, excusez ces "pattes de mouches" et croyez, cher Monsieur, à mes sentiments les plus cordiaux.

Jean Dréville

Letter from Jean Delannoy, French film director

86, rue de la Fédération
75015 PARIS

Monsieur Laurent Marie
3 Belleville Avenue
Rathgar
Dublin 6
Irlande

Paris, le 2 décembre 1995

Monsieur,

J'ai bien reçu votre lettre du 22 novembre. Je ne vois pas très bien la raison d'un doctorat basé sur "les relations entre le P.C.F. et le Cinéma français depuis la Libération".

A part les revendications salariales des Communistes à travers la CGT qu'ils contrôlent et qui continuent, dramatiquement, à désorganiser la France aujourd'hui, je ne sais pas très bien ce qui peut ressembler à une défense du cinéma français.

Il y a peu de réalisateurs français qui soient restés communistes après la Libération et, surtout après la chute du Communisme dans les pays de l'Est.

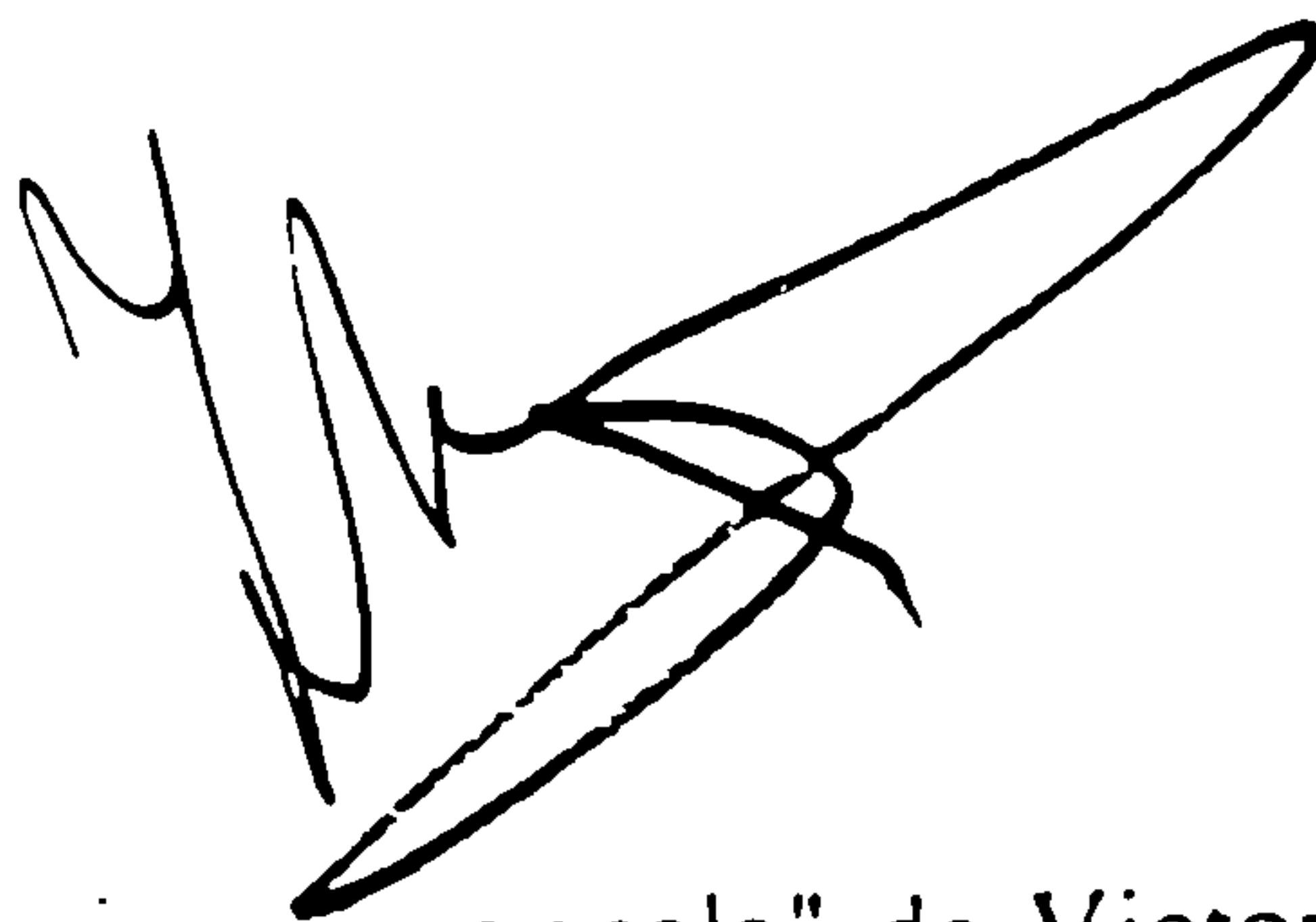
Par contre, pendant la guerre et l'occupation allemande, les communistes sont entrés dans la Résistance, acculés à l'héroïsme, comme l'ont été les juifs qui n'avaient pas été déportés.

Moi, qui ne suis ni juif, ni communiste, j'ai connu beaucoup d'entre eux, au sein du "Comité de libération du Cinéma" (Louis Daquin, Jean Grémillon...).

J'en ai même connus qui ont été engagés par la Société Allemande, "La Continentale", en cachant leur appartenance au PCF et, en reniant leur origine juive. Il faut bien manger.

Je ne peux donc vous être d'aucune utilité, mais je suis curieux de connaître votre thèse.

Avec mes sentiments les meilleurs.



P.S.: Connaissez-vous ce passage des "Souvenirs personnels" de Victor Hugo (1848-1851)?
"Le Terrorisme et le Communisme combinés et se prêtant un mutuel appui, ne sont autre chose que l'antique attentat contre les personnes et contre les propriétés. Quand on plonge au plus profond des choses, on descend même au-delà de Marat et du Père Duchesne et il se trouve que le Communisme s'appelle Cartouche et que le Terrorisme s'appelle Mandrin!!...."

See introduction, p. 23 and chapter 1, p. 68.

Paris 27 Dec - 95

Malgré l'accord entre Staline et Hitler
avant la guerre le communisme fut pour
beaucoup le camp des libérateurs.

L'armée Rouge luttait avec les Alliés
contre la dictature nazie.

Fallait-il rallier à la dictature communiste
pour lutter contre une autre dictature?

Mon premier film fut "Le Point du Jour"
de Louis Breguière membre du parti communiste.

Ce fut un échec (un peu excentré ostentatoire)
et au bout d'un an un film "historique"
sur son sujet et de ses réalisateurs.

Non, arides idéologies.

Il ne faut pas le voir.

La politique est une idéologie.

L'Art est une idéologie.

Ces idéologies sont folles.

Sans idéologie nous étouffons.

De 1945 à 1954 nous y croyions.

A suivre. Surtout à nous.

Michel Piccoli

A Laurent Marie

Paris 27 Décembre 1995

Malgré l'accord entre Staline et Hitler avant la guerre le communisme fut pour beaucoup le camp des libérateurs.

L'Armée Rouge luttait avec les Alliés contre la dictature nazie.

Fallait-il s'allier à la dictature communiste pour lutter contre une autre dictature? Mon premier film fut *Le Point du jour* de Louis Daquin membre du parti communiste. Ce fut un échec (un peu censuré officiellement, et aujourd'hui un film "historique" de par son sujet et de par son réalisateur.

Nous avons des idéologies.

Il ne faut pas le renier.

La politique est une idéologie.

L'Art est une idéologie.

Les idéologies sont folles.

Sans idéologie nous étouffons

De 1945 à 1994 nous y croyions.

A suivre. Sincèrement à vous

Michel Piccoli

Lavista *Junker* *Luc*
Luc
PARIS, Le 26 Juin 1952

Les comédiens, techniciens et travailleurs du film travaillant à la réalisation du film "IL EST MINUIT DOCTEUR SCHWEITZER", en cours de tournage à Billancourt, réunis

Dugel

Quinto
Tracy
Emo
87

- ~~Followers~~
 Mason & Davis
 Great Future
 Letter

Jacob George
Albert Ernest
Hylton
~~Lange~~
~~Morgan~~
Franklin
Wright
~~Harris~~
Theodore
Jesse
Henry Davis
Henrietta
Nash

Raymond Le Bourre Reveals Communist Influence in French Film Industry

Air-Terre-Mer, (2) n° 10, March 1952.

Raymond Le Bourre Reveals Communist Influence in the French Film Industry

THE Le Bourre case which was reported on the front page of the French daily newspapers for several days exceeds in importance the domain of the cinema.

On January 24, Raymond Le Bourre, General Secretary of the French Federation of the Theater, Cinema, etc. (Force Ouvrière) was relieved of his functions as sub-director of the National Center of Cinematography, which he had held since January 1947, by Mr. Fourré-Cormieray, director of the same center.

The opponents of Le Bourre lost no time in stating that this was purely an internal question. Let us see if this is true.

As soon as he was nominated to the post from which he has just been removed, Le Bourre was opposed to communistic interference. He frankly denounced the suspicious actions of Mr. Fourré-Cormieray, the big boss of the French cinema, who, it is curious to note, is surrounded by notorious Stalinians.

With great courage, Le Bourre made a public statement as follows :

« Mr. Michel Fourré-Cormieray has never ceased to play the game of the communists. For a period of four years he abandoned some of his highest privileges in favor of Mr. Claude Jaeger, sub-director of the National Center, ex-colonel Michelin of the F.T.P. of Brittany, who was such a dangerous communist militant that a minister, Mr. Marcellin, had to relieve him of his functions in January 1950 as also his deputy, Mr. Bloch-Delahaie, who was responsible for the cell in the 6th arrondissement of Paris.

« During these four years of administrative dictatorship, Mr. Jaeger eliminated from the production all non-communist elements. He cleaned up his departments and encouraged the « proletarianization » of doubtful producers provided they agreed to engage Stalinian workers.

« Since then we have seen that Mr. Fourré-Cormieray was incapable of taking sanctions against the

firm of Procinex, a broadcasting company of Soviet films of Europe, managed by the same Jaeger. Still better, this firm is perfectly at liberty to produce a film embodying communistic agitation which is to be shown in countries of the French Union. In addition to this, it obtains from Mr. Ingrand, High-Commissary of Tourism, official orders for the production of touristic propaganda films !

« Mr. Fourré-Cormieray has also shown favor towards the intellectuals inclined towards the communist doctrines, including the Institute of Advanced Cinematograph Studies and the French Federation of Cinema-Clubs to whom a minister, Mr. Lacoste, in virtue of a decree signed on September 21st 1949, handed over the cinema clubs and the associations connected with the educative cinematograph productions ! »

The above explains the whole attitude of Raymond Le Bourre and why he was dismissed from his post without any reason being given.

It is worth noting that the revocation of Le Bourre took place just before a parliamentary commission was to undertake investigations at the National Center, whereas this commission had expressed the desire that no changes should be made in the administration of the cinema until it had come to a decision.

In getting Le Bourre dismissed from his official post, the Stalinians thought they were getting rid of a formidable accuser.

They were entirely mistaken.

The removal of Le Bourre has increased the number of his adherents throughout the entire country. The large newspapers insisted that the voice of free syndicalism be heard in this affair. At the same time the intrigues of the communist party within the framework of the French cinema were revealed to the public eye. The Le Bourre case, as already mentioned, has stretched beyond the narrow sphere in which efforts were made to confine it, and has become the expression of free syn-

dicalism against Stalinian oppression.

The ostracism of which Le Bourre was the object has considerably strengthened the links which bind free syndicates together. Resolutions condemning the decision taken have been voted by Departemental Unions (especially in the Paris district and the departements of Bouches-du-Rhône, etc...), by various federations (textiles, ports, docks, etc...), by the Inter-Federal Committee of Civil Servants and Postmen and by the National Syndicate of Journalists. Finally, the syndicalist cartel of the Cinematograph Industry (which includes the Force Ouvrière, the C. F. T. C. and the autonomous companies) made a public announcement which leaves no room for ambiguity and which reads as follows : « The colonization of the French cinema, encouraged for five years by a high functionary who, if he has any sense of honor left, should resign immediately. »

Certainly, Mr. Fourré-Cormieray is still at the head of the National Center of the French Cinema. But he is at the end of his reign. Consciously or unconsciously, Stalin's accomplice will henceforth be at the mercy of the slightest incident. The free syndicates have an eye on him and though the Le Bourre case may appear to be over as far as the administrative side is concerned, this is by no means the case as regards the syndicates and the government. As the syndicalist cartel of the cinema industry has stated « Neither stifling nor rottenness will triumph over the free syndicalists ».

The conclusions of the Parliamentary Commission of investigation will be made known without delay. Whatever they may be, the real problem can no longer be eluded. The existence of a powerful Stalinian machinery within the framework of the French cinema has been publicly proved and the men who have lent their authority to Soviet influence are condemned. The free syndicates will continue their cleaning-up process until all dangerous elements are eliminated.

La réception critique de *l'Amour d'une femme*¹

Le 9 décembre 1953, sous les auspices du Ciné-Club Brestois, le “Select” présente en première mondiale *l'Amour d'une femme*, le nouveau film de Jean Grémillon, devant un public composé de notables locaux, d'îliens d'Ouessant et de cinéphiles bretons². Lors de la rencontre qui fait suite à la projection, qui fut accueillie avec chaleur et fierté, M. Guillou, président du Ciné-Club, demande au réalisateur ce qu'il pense de l'action des ciné-clubs. Jean Grémillon explique qu'il les approuve entre autre parce que “le Ciné-Club permet de revoir d'excellents films quelque peu tombés dans l'oubli”³. Par cette déclaration prémonitoire le cinéaste bayeusain scelle le destin du film. En effet, une distribution inadéquate et une réception critique mitigée ne faciliteront en rien la carrière commerciale du film, qui ne devra sa très discrète notoriété qu'à l'action épisodique des ciné-clubs et des cinémas d'art et essai.

L'échec public de *l'Amour d'une femme*, le prestige de son auteur, que chacun s'accorde à placer au tout premier rang du cinéma français, et l'originalité de son thème soulèvent la question de sa réception critique. Quelle fut l'accueil de la grande presse généraliste et cinématographique, “à tendance cinéphile” ? Au vu des prises de position de Jean Grémillon, discerne-t-on une ligne de partage politique dans l'appréciation de *l'Amour d'une femme* ? Enfin, la dimension féministe de ce long métrage suscita-t-elle réactions et débats dans la presse féminine ? Avant de répondre à ces multiples questions, il serait sans doute utile en premier lieu de se remémorer et l'histoire et le thème de *l'Amour d'une femme*, pour ensuite préciser les conditions de sa sortie.

Laissons à son interprète principale, le soin de rappeler la première et à son créateur, le second. Micheline Presle résume ainsi l'intrigue : “J'y suis une femme-médecin entièrement absorbée par son métier. Un jeune ingénieur italien (interprété par Massimo Girotti), vient à

¹ See chapter 2, pp. 117-121. This article was published in 1895, *revue d'histoire du cinéma*, hors-série Jean Grémillon (October 1997), 83-99.

² Voir les coupures de la presse locale in Archives Grémillon, JG 22 (011), Bibliothèque de l'Arsenal.

³ *Brest-Matin*, 11 décembre 1953.

Ouessant pour installer une sirène. Nous nous rencontrons, nous nous aimons, mais finalement, je renonce à cet amour pour me consacrer à mes malades, car pour « lui », une épouse doit limiter sa vie exclusivement à son foyer et à ses enfants sans autre perspective”⁴. Jean Grémillon insiste sur ce thème émancipateur dès les premiers jets du scénario : “La femme d’aujourd’hui doit travailler. Puisque ce fait social est devenu à peu près inéluctable, le principal souci d’une jeune fille est d’aborder la vie avec le métier qu’elle a choisi. Elle prend ainsi dans la société une place qu’elle dispute souvent à l’homme. Mais cette réussite matérielle lui assure-t-elle l’équilibre et le bonheur qu’elle avait trouvés jusqu’ici dans ses seuls rôles d’épouse et de mère ? C’est le problème que Marie Prieur tente de résoudre”⁵.

Après une présentation corporative au “Marignan” le 16 mars 1954, le film ne sort en exclusivité le 28 avril 1954 que dans une seule salle, le “Studio de l’Étoile — Cinéma d’essai”, où il reste à l’affiche durant quatre semaines seulement, pour être remplacé par *la Passion de Jeanne d’arc* et *un Chien andalou*. Le film déménage au Montparnasse-Pathé, puis les semaines suivantes dans deux, huit, puis neuf salles, pour finir dans deux cinémas avant de disparaître des écrans parisiens le 7 juillet, après dix semaines d’exploitation⁶. Bouclé depuis le mois de juillet précédent (le tournage eut lieu du 23 mai au 12 juillet), l’une des 36 coproductions franco-italiennes de l’année 1953 aura donc attendu, après ses “premières mondiales bretonnes”⁷ et une présentation au Festival de Sao Paulo en février 1954, près de dix mois une exclusivité parisienne au rabais. Nul doute que cette distribution tronquée, véritable sabotage commercial⁸, nuit aux chances de succès du film. Fut elle mentionnée par la presse de l’époque ?

⁴ *Heures Claires*, n° 104, mars 1954.

⁵ Résumé du film, 6 janvier 1953, in Fonds Crédit National, CN 617, BIFI.

⁶ *Le Figaro*, les 5, 12, 19, 26 mai, 2, 9, 16, 23, 30 juin et 7 juillet 1954.

⁷ À Brest le 9 décembre et Landerneau, au “Family-Cinéma”, le 1er janvier 1954, in Archives Jean Grémillon, JG 22 (O08), Bibliothèque de l’Arsenal.

⁸ Le dossier du Crédit National CN 617 mentionne que la distribution du film est aux mains des Films Richebé. Dans son autobiographie (*Au delà de l’écran, 70 ans de cinéma*. Monte Carlo : Éditions Pastorelli, 1977, pp. 167-174), Roger Richebé fait état de ses démêlés avec Louis Daquin et Christian-Jaque à la Libération. Son anticommunisme “français” s’y révèle très clairement. Connaissant l’activité de Jean Grémillon durant cette période, aurait-on là l’une des explications de cette distribution assassine ? Au vu de cette rancune tenace, c’est une piste...

Rares sont les critiques qui évoquent les difficultés de distribution auxquelles le film doit faire face ou celles que son réalisateur affronte depuis quelques années. Ceux qui se chargent de rappeler ces entraves à la carrière du réalisateur se rangent plutôt à gauche et comptent souvent parmi les défenseurs du cinéma français au sein des multiples comités qui fleurissent depuis 1946. André Bazin, regrettant que le talent de Jean Grémillon “n’ait que trop peu l’occasion de se manifester”⁹, désigne expressément dans *Télérama*, le boycott de l’exploitation cinématographique qui condamne le film “à ne même pas courir sa chance près d’un public dont les propriétaires de tiroirs-caisses ont décrété a priori « qu’il n’aimerait pas cela »”¹⁰. Même point de vue avancé de manière plus explicite par Rodolphe-Maurice Arlaud dans *Combat*, pour qui Grémillon est “la plus grande injustice de notre temps”¹¹. Il reproche aux salles qui refusent de programmer *l’Amour d’une femme*, leur manque de discernement tout comme leur incapacité à reconnaître “l’intelligence sèche et pure” de son créateur, lui préférant aussi bien les “Ded Rysel, les œuvres complètes de M. Rode, ou le pin-up boy Mariano”. En ne reconnaissant pas le caractère profondément populaire du cinéma de Grémillon, en confondant celui-ci avec “une recherche de laboratoire qui n’intéresse que quelques esthètes abscons”, ces distributeurs obtus jettent “Grémillon à la rue, comme les clients de l’abbé Pierre”, recueilli par le seul “Cinéma d’Essai, qui avait devancé l’abbé Pierre dans la création d’un Centre pour films clochards”. Jean Rochereau, critique à *la Croix*, suggère, sans s’y attarder, qu’une censure politique pourrait avoir entravé la carrière de Jean Grémillon¹². Comme l’on pouvait s’y attendre, l’aile communiste de la critique n’hésite pas, guerre froide oblige, à nommer l’ennemi. Après avoir rappelé la carrière du réalisateur, Georges Sadoul s’en prend à Léon Blum qui “en immolant [le cinéma français] aux intérêts américains” et “en sacrifiant ainsi une part de l’indépendance nationale” devient en quelque sorte responsable du silence forcé dont fut victime le metteur en scène de *Lumière d’été*¹³. Plus surprenant, Sadoul omet de mentionner les difficultés de distribution de *l’Amour d’une*

⁹ *Le Parisien libéré*, 30 avril 1954.

¹⁰ *Télérama*, 9 juin 1954.

¹¹ *Combat*, 4 mai 1954.

¹² *La Croix*, 14 mai 1954.

¹³ *Les Lettres françaises*, 6 mai 1954.

femme. Son camarade Armand Monjo ne les oublie pas mais les impute à “l’hostilité de certains milieux de distribution cinématographiques”. Selon le critique, qui compare le film à quelques films soviétiques récents (*le Médecin du village*, *le Destin de Marina*), cette hostilité provient de ce que *l’Amour d’une femme* montre “ce qui s’oppose, dans notre régime, à l’émancipation réelle de la femme et la conquête de son bonheur”, soulignant ainsi “l’opposition entre notre société et la société soviétique”¹⁴. C’est là un exemple frappant, et emblématique, des excès de la critique communiste française pendant sa période stalinienne. Pourtant, dans son outrance, le journaliste de *l’Humanité* réussit à définir, très exactement comme nous allons le voir, la dominante de la réception critique du film, où, selon ses propres mots, “l’on affecte de considérer comme vieillot et dépassé le problème de l’égalité de la femme, ou l’on reproche au film certains excès de réalisme pour ne reconnaître que sa poésie.”

Peu nombreux sont les critiques qui soutiennent franchement et passionnément le film. Georges Sadoul, qui ajoute aux références soviétiques, celle *Bérénice* de Racine, fidèle en cela au discours communiste sur la pérennité de l’art national, juge que ce sont “la noblesse et la simplicité” qui dominent ce “très beau film, plein de sensibilité et de passion” où se pose la question “d’une véritable égalité dans la vie et dans les droits entre l’homme et la femme”. Bernard Chardère exprime toute son admiration lors d’un entretien avec Jean Grémillon précédant la sortie parisienne du film, mais publié postérieurement à celle-ci, dans le n° 10 de *Positif* : “Pour mon compte, *l’Amour d’une femme* m’apparaît comme une œuvre parfaitement réussie, jamais ennuyeuse”¹⁵. Dans *France-Observateur*, Jacques Doniol-Valcroze avoue sa partialité puisqu’il confesse une amitié “fidèle et précieuse” au réalisateur¹⁶. Soulignant que “le problème de la femme et de son métier n’a guère été abordé à l’écran”, il trouve le film “beau et rude, authentique et probe”, concluant “qu’on ne peut rien faire de bon qui ne soit d’abord témoignage profond, sourdement passionné, constat

¹⁴ *L’Humanité*, 10 mai 1954.

¹⁵ *Positif*, n° 10, pp. 57-59.

¹⁶ *France-Observateur*, 29 avril 1954. En octobre 1953, à la suite d’une projection apparemment privée, le critique avait déjà fait part de ces mêmes impressions à son ami metteur en scène, in Archives Grémillon, JG 22 (O14), Bibliothèque de l’Arsenal.

d'un temps et d'un état d'âme, délivrance d'une obsession". Après avoir fait le rapprochement entre les deux premiers rôles féminins du *Ciel est à vous* et de *l'Amour d'une femme*, Simone Dubreuilh, de *Libération*, l'une des rares femmes critiques à l'époque, se montre elle aussi enthousiaste pour "ce grand film français si riche de qualités qu'on oublie les quelques faiblesses de son développement", dans lequel Marie Prieur est "une femme très bien. Une de ces innombrables femmes [...] dont la vie privée a moins d'importance que le métier"¹⁷. Le très enthousiaste Saint Blanquat, officiant à *Réforme*, "le grand hebdomadaire protestant d'information générale", considère que le film est "hors concours, loin de tout" mais "secret et peut-être difficile"¹⁸. André Bazin défend le film malgré quelques faiblesses de détails. S'il n'atteint pas son public, ce que laisse entrevoir le fondateur des *Cahiers du cinéma*, c'est que "le public n'aime guère qu'on mélange l'intelligence et le goût de la simplicité aux bons sentiments"¹⁹. Il défend également l'aventure morale dépeinte dans le film ; le choix de l'héroïne "n'est peut-être pas plus sophistiqué que celui des héros de Corneille, mais il n'est pas plus ridicule ni moins vrai que l'existence de ce paysage et la vie quotidienne de ces pêcheurs et de ces ouvriers".

Ainsi les critiques réellement favorables au film se comptent-elles sur les doigts de la main. Mises à part celles-ci, la presse dans sa grande majorité réserve un accueil mitigé à *l'Amour d'une femme*. Dominant, nuancés d'un journal à l'autre, les "en dépit de" et les "malgré". Jean-José Richer dans *les Cahiers du cinéma* parvient à la fois à apprécier chez Grémillon "une *sensibilité du cœur* assez rare pour qu'on la distingue nettement de cette sensibilité intellectuelle qui est monnaie courante chez les professionnels de l'art et de l'esprit", et à s'en moquer légèrement : "La conception de l'amour dans ce film est un exemple [de candeur innée] frappant : en filigrane transparaît une naïveté, une inexpérience à l'égard de ce sentiment à la fois confondante et touchante qui amène l'auteur à rater assez régulièrement les scènes qui l'inspirent". Si Grémillon ne réussit pas selon lui à fusionner la passion et le problème professionnel pour atteindre au "tragique *pur*", il décerne néanmoins

¹⁷ *Libération*, 4 mai 1954.

¹⁸ *Réforme*, 8 mai 1954.

¹⁹ *Télérama*, 9 juin 1954.

au cinéaste Grémillon le titre d'auteur : "Peu d'hommes de cinéma introduisent ce léger *recul*, cette distance entre les personnages, entre les choses, entre l'écran et le spectateur, qui ménagent entre chacun de ces éléments une espèce de respiration intime"²⁰. François Truffaut dans *Arts* juge sévèrement le film : "En dépit de tout cela — on retrouve dans le film "le pessimisme et la noirceur un peu faciles de bien des films français actuels" et son style est "très avant-guerre". Ses reproches sont adressés au metteur en scène : "*l'Amour d'une femme* est une entreprise probe et honnête, aucunement inférieure aux meilleurs films de son auteur"²¹. Par-delà les avis sur le film, les quatre points de vue des collaborateurs des *Cahiers du cinéma* cités jusqu'ici (Bazin, Doniol-Valcroze, Richer, Truffaut) sont symptomatiques des différents courants qui traversaient la rédaction de la revue. Truffaut poursuit sa dénonciation de la « qualité française », Richer défend vaille que vaille la notion d'auteur, Doniol-Valcroze et Bazin, démontrent un attachement à la notion de sujet.

Le doublage de Massimo Girotti fait l'unanimité contre lui²². S'il gâte le plaisir du critique du *Canard enchaîné* : "Quand s'apercevra-t-on que cette solution bâtarde ne fait que gâcher des films qui avaient tout pour être excellents ?"²³, il n'empêche ni Simone Dubreuilh, ni Jacques Doniol-Valcroze, qui le trouvent tout à fait inadéquat, d'apprécier le film. Ce dernier se demande d'ailleurs s'il n'aurait pas été possible que l'acteur dise son texte en français. Jean Grémillon répond à toutes ces critiques dans l'entretien déjà cité : "Massimo Girotti savait suffisamment le français pour ne pas être doublé s'il avait pu venir se perfectionner quelques semaines : or, il est descendu du train une heure et demie avant le début du tournage"²⁴. Comment en vouloir à un metteur en scène qui a vu son travail brimé depuis près de sept ans d'accepter les contraintes de la coproduction ? Ce ne fut certainement pas de gaieté de cœur que nombre de cinéastes français prestigieux durent se plier à ce système²⁵.

²⁰ *les Cahiers du cinéma*, n° 35, mai 1954.

²¹ *Arts*, 28 avril 1954.

²² Y compris Micheline Presle, in *l'Arrière-mémoire*. Paris : Flammarion, 1994, p. 138.

²³ *Le Canard enchaîné*, 5 mai 1954.

²⁴ *Positif*, op. cit.

²⁵ Pour preuve, la création du « Comité R » peu de temps avant le Festival de Cannes 1954. Voir Ado Kyrou, 'Images d'un festival: Cannes 1954', *Positif*, n° 10, pp. 75-81 et *l'Humanité*, 8 avril 1954.

La séquence médicale, durant laquelle Marie Prieur soigne une hernie dont est victime un gardien de phare, soulève quant à elle, quelques haut-le-cœur pour le moins disproportionnés. Jean Rochereau la trouve “indigne” du metteur en scène. C’est un “tripotage de viscères” qui choque Jean de Baroncelli autant que Jean Dutourd, critique à *Carrefour*, hebdomadaire qui se veut celui de “l’intelligence française pour atteindre une clientèle au pouvoir d’achat élevé”²⁶, qui ne comprend pas que Grémillon puisse “se complaire à filmer de telles horreurs”²⁷. Le critique du *Figaro*, Louis Chauvet, voudrait, lui, qu’on lui démontre “une fois pour toutes les rapports qui peuvent bien exister entre l’art d’exprimer des sentiments et l’art de charcuter les corps”²⁸. Chez certains critiques, cette accumulation de notes négatives trahit un accueil sans conviction, pour d’autres, elle confirme un désaveu plus franc, à défaut d’être toujours bien argumenté.

Cependant une constante se dégage au sein de la critique : on admire le talent de cinéaste de Grémillon mais l’on conteste ses dons de scénariste. Pour Jean Rochereau, le film apporte, “à peu près à parts égales, déception et contentement”, alors que Jean Néry pour *Franc-Tireur* considère quant à lui que Jean Grémillon “a réussi un film dont son renom sort grandi, malgré des embûches dues à la coproduction, au doublage et aux faiblesses de scénario”²⁹. C’est le plus souvent le poète du cinéma que l’on loue. Ainsi Jean de Baroncelli, critique au *Monde*, pour qui “ce film à moitié manqué a un « charme » que bien des ouvrages plus réussis n’ont pas. C’est peut-être que l’aile de la poésie l’a effleuré”³⁰. La poésie de paysages bretons l’emportant sur les péripéties d’un scénario qui ne le satisfait point, Claude Mauriac, du *Figaro littéraire*, considère cependant que Grémillon “apporte une nouvelle preuve d’un talent qui ne ressemble à aucun autre”³¹.

C’est majoritairement au sein de la presse de droite que les critiques se montrent les plus implacables. Sans doute l’engagement politique de Grémillon peut-il expliquer en partie la

²⁶ *Annuaire de la presse* 1954, p. 328.

²⁷ *Carrefour*, 12 mai 1954.

²⁸ *Le Figaro*, 5 mai 1954.

²⁹ *Franc-Tireur*, 1 juin 1954.

³⁰ *Le Monde*, 6 mai 1954.

³¹ *Le Figaro littéraire*, 1 mai 1954.

virulence de Chauvet ou de Dutourd. Le premier n'y voit "qu'un récit larmoyant, parfois lugubre, coupé d'insuffisantes éclaircies", tandis que le second s'en prend à "l'esthétisme, le fléau de l'art, ou plutôt dépravation de la fonction créatrice" dans lequel serait tombé Grémillon, qui dédaigne "les idées originales ou fortes, les caractères vrais, la psychologie, les personnages nouveaux". Et s'il reconnaît à Grémillon "son grand respect du cinéma, son profond amour de la beauté plastique, son lyrisme sincère", cela ne l'empêche pas de terminer sur une note dont la misogynie éclate plus fortement encore au vu du sujet de *l'Amour d'une femme* : "Qu'on me pardonne, ce film de M. Grémillon, avec son histoire stupide et ses images superbes, me fait penser à une fille très jolie mais complètement idiote. Ce n'est pas ces sortes de filles que l'on épouse". Ancien admirateur du metteur en scène, — "Grémillon est un artiste [et] les artistes dignes de ce nom ont le goût de la vérité"³² —, François Vinneuil se demande dix années plus tard dans *Dimanche-matin*, "s'il n'y a pas chez [le cinéaste] une incapacité foncière au récit filmé", tout en reconnaissant que la Bretagne et la mer demeurent des sujets où la caméra de Grémillon fait merveille³³. Claude Brule dans *Paris-Presse* déclare lui avoir "attendu en vain, tout au long de ce nouveau film de Grémillon, la moindre preuve de talent"³⁴. G. Martain dans *Rivarol*, publication d'extrême-droite, donne du film une lecture idéologique, délibérément anti-laïque³⁵ — "Médecin et instituteur, main dans la main, vont donc conduire les habitants de l'île vers des lendemains qui chantent" — et va même jusqu'à rejeter ce sur quoi la critique dans son ensemble s'accorde : la beauté et la poésie de la Bretagne telles que Grémillon les révèle dans son film : "Jamais île n'avait été aussi malmenée", et ce dans un compte rendu où la mauvaise foi l'emporte sur le minimum d'objectivité requise : "Grémillon est insensible à l'âme des objets et des hommes... il ne saisit pas les rapports qui existent entre eux... il n'a aucune tendresse pour les fruits de la terre, qu'ils soient sains ou gâtés"³⁶.

³² À propos du *Ciel est à vous*, *Je suis partout*, 11 février 1954.

³³ *Dimanche matin*, 16 mai 1954.

³⁴ *Paris-Presse*, 5 mai 1954.

³⁵ Alors que La Centrale Catholique du cinéma ne voit dans le film rien de très répréhensible. Centrale Catholique, *les Fiches du Cinéma*, n° 1766-1-54.

³⁶ *Rivarol*, 6 mai 1954.

Cette dernière diatribe et la critique « anti-esthétique » de Jean Dutourd exceptées, il est clair que la mise en relief des qualités visuelles de *l'Amour d'une femme*, de sa poésie, de son inspiration par laquelle on surtout hommage à un Grémillon du passé, cache la déception ressentie devant le scénario. C'est sur lui qui portent tous les reproches. Un jeune hebdomadaire, *l'Express*, se montre particulièrement cinglant envers la manière dont l'histoire est abordée. Ne voyant dans le film qu'un "ragoût de poncifs", son critique regrette que le problème de la place des femmes dans la société, pourtant "très aigu", y soit traité "si sommairement et surtout si platement"³⁷. Éternel débat du fond et de la forme. Celui-là satisfait des critiques situés à gauche (Doniol-Valcroze, Simone Dubreuilh, Georges Sadoul, André Bazin), qui n'ont pas manqué de mettre en avant l'aspect social et féministe du sujet, en soulignant la rareté du thème au sein du cinéma français³⁸. Celle-ci provoque les foudres des jeunes modernistes qui veulent "faire décoller la France"³⁹, ou de jeunes critiques appelant au renouveau. Mélodrame pour les uns, tragédie féministe pour les autres, "mélodrame féministe" pour Truffaut, *l'Amour d'une femme* mérite que l'on s'arrête sur sa réception au sein de la presse féminine.

Rodolphe-Maurice Arlaud reproche à Jean Grémillon de s'être "abaissé au niveau des lectrices de *Confidences* ou quelque autre *Cœur à cœur* ou *Nous deux*". Il aurait été bien inspiré de feuilleter cette « presse du cœur » car il y aurait vu que le message social et féministe de Grémillon se situe à l'opposé de l'idéologie véhiculée par ces revues et celle de leur lectorat. Dans le numéro de *Confidences* précédant la sortie parisienne de *l'Amour d'une femme*, on peut lire sous la rubrique "Problème humain" une lettre (authentique ?) dans laquelle un certain Charles L. demande aux lecteurs et lectrices du magazine leur opinion sur la question suivante : Renée, son épouse, "au demeurant charmante et aimante", désire

³⁷ *L'Express*, 8 mai 1954.

³⁸ Nous n'avons pas la place ici d'évoquer précisément *le Point du jour* de Louis Daquin, dont l'un des sous-récits est aussi d'un féminisme très avancé. Il concerne un jeune couple de mineurs dont la jeune femme, Marie, affirme sa volonté de continuer à travailler une fois mariée à Georges : "Je ne me marie pas pour m'enfermer à la maison". Bien sûr, le jeune homme se montre d'abord très réticent — "Et si on a des gosses ?" À la différence de *l'Amour d'une femme*, le fiancé finit par comprendre et accepter les arguments de sa future épouse, en tirant même, réalisme socialiste oblige, une certaine fierté. Voir *le Point du jour, l'Avant-scène-cinéma*, n° 205, 1 avril 1978, pp. 20-22, 32, 49 et le scénario de *l'Amour d'une femme*, fonds Crédit National, CN 1352, pp. 671-672.

³⁹ Françoise Giroud, *Si je mens*, Paris : Éditions Stock, 1972, p. 138.

travailler, ce que lui “ne saurait envisager d’un bon œil”. Il explique qu’il gagne suffisamment sa vie, que sa femme perdrait la notion de l’argent (sic), et, qu’enfin, il est choqué et ne comprend pas pourquoi elle se plaint d’être lasse des travaux ménagers puisqu’après tout, “n’est-ce pas déjà bien d’avoir, comme Renée, un après-midi par semaine pour elle toute seule ?”⁴⁰ Neuf semaines plus tard, *Confidences* publie les réponses au mari mécontent. La plupart d’entre elles donnent tort à Renée L. dont la place est “au foyer à s’occuper de ses deux enfants”, et si le magazine offre l’un des deux abonnements gratuits à un lecteur qui encourage Renée dans son projet, celui-ci explique que “après une journée passée à faire ce qui l’intéresserait, [elle] serait heureuse de retrouver son intérieur, ses enfants et surtout *son mari*, avec qui elle pourra discuter des choses vues et entendues”⁴¹ (je souligne).

Il est facile d’imaginer quelle fin ces lectrices et lecteurs auraient préférée si Jean Grémillon leur avait proposé de choisir. De fait, la presse féminine dans son ensemble ne s’enthousiasme pas pour la décision de Marie Prieur. Le magazine *Elle* considère que l’histoire n’est guère “attachante” tout en mettant en doute le réalisme même de la décision de son héroïne : “Si vous croyez qu’une femme est capable de sacrifier son bonheur personnel et un mariage d’amour à une vocation désintéressée, allez voir *l’Amour d’une femme*”⁴². Ni *Femmes d’aujourd’hui* ni *le Nouveau Fémina*, qui comprend pourtant une rubrique cinéma⁴³, ne mentionnent le film. Enfin *Marie-France* invite ses lectrices à voir le film parce que “Jean Grémillon est un grand metteur en scène” et non pour les qualités émancipatrices de *l’Amour d’une femme*, qui ne serait sans son auteur qu’un “mélodrame ennuyeux”⁴⁴.

À l’instar de l’ensemble de la presse communiste, les revues et journaux contrôlés par le PCF et destinés à un lectorat féminin revendiquent leur différence. Les trois titres concernés, *Heures Claires*, *Femmes françaises* et *Filles de France* se veulent la seule alternative «

⁴⁰ *Confidences*, n° 338, dépôt légal Bibliothèque Nationale, 24 avril 1954.

⁴¹ *Confidences*, n° 349, dépôt légal Bibliothèque Nationale, 12 juillet 1954.

⁴² *Elle*, n° 441, 24 mai 1954.

⁴³ Voir par exemple la double page de Roger Nimier contre “les cinéastes ignares qui ont transformé les salles de cinéma en salle de classe”, *le Nouveau Fémina*, mai 1954.

⁴⁴ *Marie-France*, n° 493, 24 mai 1954.

saine » face à une presse féminine, qui de *Elle* à *Nous Deux*, se voit qualifiée de « bourgeoise »⁴⁵. Chacun d'entre eux consacre un article à *l'Amour d'une femme. Femmes françaises*, ouvertement politique⁴⁶, aborde plus que les deux autres les problèmes de société. La grande campagne du moment défend et promeut chaque semaine l'accouchement sans douleur⁴⁷. Raconté en détail par Jeannette Coutant, *L'Amour d'une femme* est défendu sans excès : "Marie est la femme : la beauté, le charme, la douceur, l'énergie, l'intelligence. une femme qui est digne d'inspirer un grand amour [...] *L'Amour d'une femme* est un film qui a de multiples et solides qualités. Un très bon film. Nous vous conseillons d'aller le voir". *Heures Claires*, plus « grand public » tout en conservant une ligne politique claire, consacre sa couverture à Micheline Presle, dont elle publie un entretien avec Marinette Javet, "Chez Micheline Presle, femme d'intérieur", où celle-ci annonce la sortie de son dernier film. C'est pourtant dans le rôle traditionnel de la femme au foyer que la journaliste nous présente la comédienne. Nous faisant visiter son nouvel appartement, elle souligne "qu'en bonne femme d'intérieur, l'actrice a d'abord songé à installer sa cuisine, la chambre à coucher de sa petite fille et sa chambre à coucher", puis après avoir rappelé que Micheline Presle sait tricoter et faire la cuisine, elle s'émerveille que cette jeune femme "trouve le temps d'être femme d'intérieur, mère de famille et grande actrice"⁴⁸. Le magazine *Filles de France*, destiné aux jeunes femmes, indique sous la plume très didactique de Lucette Thomazo ce qu'il faut penser de *l'Amour d'une femme*, à savoir "que le métier de Marie ne devrait pas être un obstacle à leur amour, mais, au contraire, leur métier respectif devrait les rapprocher et donner un attrait encore plus grand à leur amour"⁴⁹. La presse féminine d'obédience communiste réserve au film un accueil positif mais sans passion.

⁴⁵ Voir à ce sujet Renée Rousseau, *Les Femmes rouges*. Paris: Éditions Albin Michel, 1983, en particulier pp. 192-217.

⁴⁶ On y trouve régulièrement des articles pour la paix en Indochine ou contre la C.E.D. (Communauté Européenne de Défense).

⁴⁷ "La Femme, véritables créatrices de la vie" in *Femmes françaises*, n° 492, 8 mai 1954. L'accouchement sans douleur deviendra en avril 1957 le thème du *Cas du Dr Laurent* de Jean-Paul Le Chanois.

⁴⁸ *Heures Claires*, n° 104, mars 1954.

⁴⁹ *Filles de France*, n° 276, juin 1954.

Cette réception met en relief les limites de la politique communiste, que ce soit envers les femmes ou la culture. Si, comme le rappelle Gisèle Moreau⁵⁰, le PCF considère les femmes comme des travailleuses exploitées et des citoyennes à part entière⁵¹, il n'admet pas, au milieu des années cinquante, le combat féministe en tant que tel. Il suffit de citer ce compte rendu d'une réunion d'une journée d'études sur le travail du parti parmi les femmes sous l'égide du Comité fédéral de la Seine pour s'en convaincre : "La qualité de la discussion a été tout particulièrement soulignée par notre direction fédérale. Les femmes communistes ne sont, en effet, pas venues poser les problèmes qu'elles voulaient débattre d'un point de vue féministe, comme cela a pu se produire quelquefois. Elles ne sont pas venues se plaindre « des camarades hommes qui ne comprennent pas ». Elles sont venues en communistes dont la tâche particulière est de rassembler, d'unir toutes les femmes dans la lutte pour sauver la paix, afin d'assurer à leurs petits une vie meilleure"⁵². Les femmes sont encore largement instrumentalisées dans les luttes du parti. L'autonomie de leurs revendications n'est pas encore reconnue. Monique Paris, du Bureau fédéral de la Métallurgie CGT, se demande, par exemple, si toutes les organisations du syndicat pro-communiste défendent "comme il le faudrait, c'est-à-dire pied à pied, le droit au travail pour les femmes là où il est mis en cause actuellement"⁵³. Construit sur le conflit de deux individus, sur la décision d'une femme, le film ne correspond pas aux discours communistes en vigueur, qui ne peuvent l'utiliser à leur propres fins. Comme le déclarait le cinéaste, le film "n'est pas une thèse, ni une plaidoirie : c'est simplement l'exposé d'un cas". L'absence d'une dimension démonstrative (le film ne prouve rien, ne dénonce rien) empêche de transformer *l'Amour d'une femme*, où les deux héros sont médecin et ingénieur, en un cheval de bataille idéologique, comme nous le rappelle la tentative peu concluante d'Armand Monjo citée plus haut. Aussi le journal *Femmes*

⁵⁰ Gisèle Moreau, *Libres et égales*. Paris : Messidor/Éditions sociales, 1982.

⁵¹ En 1954, le taux de salarisation de la population active féminine est de 59 %, 4 700 000 femmes travaillent et les deux tiers des femmes de vingt ans ont un emploi (la même proportion qu'en 1968). Il n'en est pas de même pour les femmes mariées et surtout pour celles qui ont des enfants, *in* Gisèle Moreau, *op. cit.*

⁵² Compte rendu de cette réunion du 28 février 1954 rassemblant 1238 délégués parmi lesquelles 1102 femmes, signé Lucienne Mazelin, *in* *France Nouvelle*, n° 437, 30 avril 1954. L'hebdomadaire du Comité Central consacre pratiquement chaque semaine une page aux femmes "dans les luttes" et dans leur activité au sein du parti.

⁵³ *Le Peuple*, n° 457, 15 mai 1954. Par ailleurs, *la Revue des travailleuses CGT* ne fait pas non plus mention du film alors qu'elle annonce la sortie du *Blé en herbe*, d'*Avant le déluge* et de *Monsieur Ripois*.

françaises préfère-t-il consacrer plusieurs pages au *Destin de Marina*, film soviétique de Grégoire Alexandrov⁵⁴, qui lui permettent de vanter les mérites du régime soviétique⁵⁵. Une intervention de Jeannette Vermeersch au Comité Central du PCF en mai 1955, un an après la sortie du film, se révèle à cet égard fort intéressante. Dans son discours, la dirigeante communiste réclame une utilisation plus accrue du cinéma à des fins de propagande et plus spécialement de films français. Alors qu'elle cite en exemple *l'Amour d'une femme* dont elle écorche le titre tout en enrôlant Grémillon au sein du parti, Maurice Thorez intervient pour critiquer le manque de ferveur des communistes, "qui n'ont pas soutenu le film"⁵⁶? Ces propos trahissent à la fois l'aveu de l'échec populaire d'un art idéologique tel que le défendaient les communistes depuis le tournant jdanovien de la guerre froide⁵⁷ et le souhait de sortir d'un isolement que le PCF s'est en partie lui-même imposé. En effet, Jeannette Vermeersch n'exige pas des films où doit régner l'esprit de parti, mais souhaite simplement des films "qui fassent chaud au cœur" et qui permettent "de parler un peu [aux gens]". En 1954, l'engagement de son réalisateur — Grémillon peut être considéré comme un compagnon de route — et le thème social, exaltant la noblesse d'un travail pris à cœur, demeuraient des gages insuffisants pour que *l'Amour d'une femme* obtienne un soutien fort

⁵⁴ Ce film, dans lequel une kolkhoziennne, abandonnée par son mari, s'accomplit dans le travail et dans ses recherches pour augmenter le rendement à l'hectare de la culture des betteraves et leur teneur en sucre, ne fut pourtant montré qu'au Festival de Cannes et à une soirée organisée par France-U.R.S.S. le 21 avril 1954.

⁵⁵ "*La Destinée de Marina* est beaucoup un film de femmes, mais qui ne s'adresse pas à elles seules. Car, montrer sur un ton familial comment le sexe « faible » égale et souvent surpasse le sexe « fort », c'est décrire un phénomène bien plus général : la métamorphose que connaissent, de nos jours, la campagne et toute la société en U.R.S.S.", Georges Sadoul, *Femmes françaises*, 19 avril 1954.

⁵⁶ "[...] Le cinéma, est-ce que nous pouvons l'utiliser davantage ? Moi, je crois que nous pouvons l'utiliser davantage. Nous avons des machines, des... des appareils, nous avons des films [Maurice Thorez, derrière : 'de beaux films'], [...] nous avons même quelques films français. Il faut d'ailleurs regretter en passant que les cinéastes français, sous prétexte de défendre notre cinéma, soient aujourd'hui tombés dans la copie servile des films policiers américains. Parce qu'ils avaient donné quelques bons films qui peuvent être employés. Ils avaient donné des films... bon, par exemple, comme *Un Amour de femme*, je crois, c'est Maurice qui m'en parlait récemment, où il y avait un conflit sentimental entre un homme et une femme et où la femme lutte pour son métier, un beau métier, celui de médecin, de soigner, elle soigne les marins en mer, etc., enfin c'est un film humain, positif, [Maurice Thorez intervient derrière : 'C'est un film ??], et c'est un communiste qui l'a fait, [M. Thorez : que la bourgeoisie a fait tomber, qui a été un insuccès et nos camarades eux mêmes ne l'ont pas soutenu. S' ils l'avaient projeté dans les réunions de femmes...] [...] Nous avons comme ça pas mal de films qui peuvent nous permettre de rassembler les gens, de leur donner un bon film, un bon film qui fait chaud au cœur et en même temps leur parle un peu [...] On utilise pas suffisamment l'image". Intervention de Jeannette Vermeersch au Comité Central du PCF des 11 et 12 mai 1955 à Aubervilliers", Parti Communiste Français, [cote 1AV/4645], Archives Départementales de la Seine-Saint-Denis.

⁵⁷ Voir Laurent Casanova, *Responsabilité de l'intellectuel communiste* Paris: Editions de la Nouvelle Critique, 1949.

de l'organisation communiste. Le caractère intimiste du film, son isolement marin, sa fin mélancolique, ne pouvaient satisfaire les exigences du réalisme socialiste auquel le PCF souscrivait alors.

Rejet d'une bonne partie de la presse de droite, éloges discrets et parfois ambigus dans lesquels les bonnes notes vont plutôt au réalisateur en tant que figure prestigieuse du cinéma français qu'au film lui-même, soutien sincère mais sans passion, et surtout sans conséquence, de la presse de gauche et de la presse communiste, accueil discret et sans enthousiasme de la presse féminine, c'est une réception mi-figue mi-raisin qu'offre la presse dans son ensemble⁵⁸. Comme nous allons le voir maintenant, le film dut son salut — même très relatif — aux ciné-clubs.

Les chiffres d'exploitation restent difficiles à évaluer. *L'Amour d'une femme* n'ayant pas été répertorié dans *le Film Français* du fait de son passage au Studio de l'Étoile, il faut s'en remettre aux informations glanées dans les dossiers du Crédit National. Ainsi une lettre datée de janvier 1955, adressée à Monsieur le Président du Comité d'Attribution des Avances, fait état d'une recette qui s'élève entre les mois de mars et décembre à 38.877.318 francs et suggère que sur deux ans, celle-ci pourrait atteindre le chiffre de 100.000.000 de francs⁵⁹. Ces estimations, mises en parallèle avec la recette de la première semaine d'exploitation du film *Ali-Baba et les quarante voleurs* de Jacques Becker (avec Fernandel) — semaine du 22/24 au 28/30 décembre 1954 : entrées : 106.608, recettes : 34.963.510⁶⁰ —, fournissent une bonne indication de l'ampleur de l'échec public et commercial du film.

L'Amour d'une femme semble d'ailleurs disparaître rapidement de la mémoire non seulement du public, mais aussi des critiques, y compris ceux qui l'avaient soutenu à sa sortie. Lors d'une table ronde organisée par la revue *Cinéma 55* pour faire le bilan de l'année 1954, réunissant Jean de Baroncelli, Georges Charensol, Jacques Doniol-Valcroze, Jean Néry et Georges Sadoul, aucun des critiques ne mentionne Jean Grémillon ou l'échec de son

⁵⁸ Il faudrait, pour être complet, évoquer la presse médicale, qui ignore le film. En effet, on aurait pu s'attendre à ce que le mensuel *l'Étudiant médecin* fasse le compte-rendu du film puisqu'il en avait publié un pour la sortie du *Guérisseur* d'Yves Ciampi le mois précédent, n°76, avril 1954.

⁵⁹ Fonds Crédit National, CN 1030, BIFI.

⁶⁰ *Le Film français*, n° 550, 7 janvier 1955

dernier long métrage. Baroncelli souligne qu'Astruc, Bresson, Faurez, Pierre Prévert, Tati, Nicole Védres n'ont pas réalisé de films durant l'année écoulée mais il omet de citer Grémillon, qui lui non plus n'a rien tourné. L'oubli du metteur en scène normand apparaît d'autant plus flagrant que la discussion soulève, pour les mettre en accusation, la question des coproductions, des superproductions ainsi que de la censure⁶¹.

1955 sera néanmoins l'année Grémillon, malgré les déboires de *l'Amour d'une femme*, grâce à une tournée de quarante conférences de Grémillon sur le réalisateur Robert Flaherty dans les ciné-clubs de l'hexagone⁶². Plusieurs bulletins cinéphiles régionaux évoqueront la carrière du cinéaste à l'occasion de son passage dans leur ville, tel le Ciné-Club Brestois, qui, rappelant avoir été le premier à présenter et soutenir le film, ne comprend pas son échec qu'il met finalement sur le compte "d'un public abreuvé de « navets ». Comme l'esclave de la drogue, il finit par réclamer ce qui l'empoisonne : les uns se pâment devant les acrobaties gratuites d'un esthète de la caméra, les autres viennent absorber régulièrement leur dose de rêverie de bazar du samedi soir"⁶³. En 1957, le film entamera sa carrière au programme des ciné-clubs français. Il est à l'affiche aussi bien à Toulouse et Marseille qu'à Tours et Boulogne-sur-Mer⁶⁴, où son thème central continue d'alimenter les débats. Il n'apparaît cependant ni dans les listes de Vincent Pinel en 1964⁶⁵, ni dans celles de Jacques Chevalier en 1980⁶⁶. Il faudra attendre trente ans — le 6 février 1987 — pour que la télévision daigne le présenter... au *Ciné-Club* d'Antenne 2⁶⁷.

L'échec de *l'Amour d'une femme* porta, dit-on, le dernier coup à la carrière de Jean Grémillon. Cependant si l'on considère que la déception fut proportionnelle aux espoirs engendrés par le film, celle-ci n'atteignit peut-être pas son auteur autant que l'on se l'imagine,

⁶¹ *Cinéma* 55, n° 3, janvier 1955.

⁶² *Cinéma* 56, n° 9, février 1956. Le texte de ces conférences paraîtra dans le n° 10 de *Cinéma* 56, mars-avril 1956.

⁶³ *Ciné-Club*, Bulletin du Ciné-Club Brestois, n° 2, 10 février 1955, in Archives Grémillon, JG 51 (035), Bibliothèque de l'Arsenal.

⁶⁴ Voir Archives Grémillon, JG 22 (011), Bibliothèque de l'Arsenal.

⁶⁵ Vincent Pinel, *Introduction au ciné-club*. Paris : Editions ouvrières, 1964.

⁶⁶ Jacques Chevalier, *Ciné-club et action éducative*, collection dossiers et documentation, n° 6, Paris : C.N.D.P., 1980.

⁶⁷ Jacques Siclier, *Le Cinéma français — I. de La Bataille du rail à La Chinoise, 1945-1968*. Paris : Ramsay Cinéma, 1990, p. 51.

ou, plus exactement, l'insuccès du film se contenta de confirmer, en les aggravant, les désillusions que Jean Grémillon portait en lui depuis plusieurs années. Le metteur en scène se montrait particulièrement lucide à la fois sur le monde du cinéma et sur ses propres œuvres. Très conscient et très insatisfait de l'organisation bassement mercantile de la production, il jugeait tout aussi sévèrement les méthodes de distribution : "Que dire enfin d'un mode de diffusion de cet art qui ruine tout ce qui en lui résidait de possibilités riches et diverses de culture", s'indignait-il en décembre 1947, lors d'une conférence au Lycée Montaigne, intitulée "La liberté d'expression au cinéma et les contraintes économiques"⁶⁸. D'autre part, l'entretien avec Bernard Chardère nous dévoile un Grémillon déjà résigné quant aux chances de succès de son film. Il avoue en effet que son film "n'est pas très « attractif »", ajoutant que "peut-être du fait de son dépouillement poussé à l'extrême, il n'est pas très commercial". Le cinéaste parvient tant bien que mal à conclure sur une fragile note d'optimisme : "Pourtant, il me semble qu'il devrait retenir l'attention". Heureux d'avoir pu faire aboutir un projet qui lui tenait à cœur⁶⁹, Grémillon réalisa son dernier long métrage en artiste conscient que, comme il le déclarait lui-même, "la liberté des auteurs de films n'existe pas, mais seulement leur responsabilité"⁷⁰.

⁶⁸ Archives Grémillon, JG 51 (018), Bibliothèque de l'Arsenal.

⁶⁹ Grémillon mentionne à plusieurs reprises l'écriture d'un roman qui lui permettrait d'étoffer la psychologie des personnages du film. Ce projet littéraire ne vit jamais le jour.

⁷⁰ *Image et son*, n° 79, février 1955.

LE CERCLE CHARLES-CHEZEAU

(Suite)

son honnêteté scrupuleuse étaient doublées d'une saine curiosité, d'une intelligence continuellement à l'affût, d'un désir constant de comprendre, de se perfectionner et de confronter ses idées avec celles des autres.

Mais l'ensemble de ces qualités ne s'exerçaient pas d'une façon anarchique : elles s'appuyaient sur une connaissance approfondie de la méthode d'analyse marxiste que Charles avait su acquérir.

L'idéal qui animait notre camarade, l'idéal communiste, l'amena à considérer son métier, le cinéma, avec un sérieux, une hauteur de vue et un sens des responsabilités que justifie pleinement l'importance de cet art dans la vie nationale. Il lui commandait de lutter pour que notre pays puisse conserver librement la maîtrise de ce merveilleux moyen d'expression.

Charles Chézeau n'a jamais oublié que le combat pour le cinéma français ne peut être victorieusement mené que grâce à l'unité active de tous ceux qui font les films français et au concours agissant, surtout dans les périodes critiques, de tous les spectateurs qui ne veulent pas voir disparaître un cinéma national et indépendant, capable de donner des œuvres enrichissantes, témoignages de la culture française.

L'idéal de Charles Chézeau lui commandait d'attacher une grande importance à tout ce qui élève l'homme et de lutter contre tout ce qui le pervertit. Notre camarade dénonçait dans le cinéma comme dans les autres domaines tout ce qui sème la haine, la violence, le mépris et le désespoir, et il défendait tout ce qui enrichit le cœur et l'esprit des hommes.

C'est avec le désir de rester fidèles à son souvenir que certains d'entre nous, amis de Charles Chézeau, animés du même idéal et adeptes comme lui de la méthode d'analyse scientifique qu'est le marxisme, avons jugé utile de créer un cercle où nous pourrions étudier entre nous, et avec tous ceux de nos camarades de la profession qui le voudraient, tous les problèmes qui peuvent solliciter l'intérêt des cinéastes, en tant qu'hommes de métier et plus simplement en tant qu'hommes.

Le Cercle organisera des conférences, des débats, des projections, où pourront avoir lieu des discussions profitables à tous.

Le bulletin dont nous vous présentons ici le premier numéro se propose d'être le reflet de l'ensemble de ces activités. Cette fois-ci, il reprendra notamment quelques conclusions d'un exposé-débat que nous avons organisé il y a quelques semaines sur le Marché commun du cinéma.

Nos débuts sont modestes : mais nous espérons que, dans la profession, on estimera que le besoin d'une telle publication se faisait sentir.

LE CERCLE CHARLES-CHEZEAU.

Adresser la correspondance à
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MISE AU POINT

BULLETIN DU CERCLE CHARLES-CHEZEAU

N° 1

JUIN 1957



LE CERCLE CHARLES-CHEZEAU

NOTRE devoir, en publiant ce premier bulletin, est de renseigner nos lecteurs sur ce qu'est le Cercle Charles-Chézeau, sur les buts qu'il se propose, sur le nom que nous avons choisi de lui donner.

Pourquoi Charles Chézeau ?

Notre propos n'est pas ici de nous étendre sur les mérites de notre cher et regretté camarade. La plupart de ceux qui liront ces lignes l'ont connu et ils ont pu les apprécier.

Nous voulons simplement préciser ce qu'il représente pour nous.

Travailleur du film, Charles Chézeau avait su acquérir les vastes connaissances qui lui permirent de faire face avec compétence et efficacité aux lourdes charges que lui avaient confiées l'ensemble de ses camarades ouvriers, acteurs, techniciens.

Les qualités humaines fondamentales de Charles Chézeau, son dévouement, son courage, sa gentillesse,

(Suite au verso)

MALGRE DES DIFFICULTES REELLES LE CINEMA FRANÇAIS EST BIEN VIVANT

« La censure politique n'existe pas et Clouzot bluffe lorsqu'il dit qu'on ne lui a pas laissé faire un film sur la guerre d'Indochine... »

« La liberté d'expression est totale pour un grand metteur en scène... »

« S'il y avait une crise du cinéma, ce serait une crise d'homme et non une crise de sujet... »

« Le cinéma est purifié par l'argent. La censure n'existe pas. »

Ce sont là quelques-unes des perles que l'hebdomadaire *Arts-Spectacles* a outrageusement étalées dans un numéro spécial sur le cinéma français, paru en mai à l'occasion du Festival de Cannes. Le critique qui les cultive n'a pas craint d'intituler son article « Le cinéma français crève sous les fausses légendes ».



LA CENSURE, UNE FAUSSE LEGENDE ?

Ce triste paradoxe est lancé, comme par hasard, à l'heure où il importe à certains de tuer dans l'œuf les protestations contre les nouvelles entraves qu'apporterait à la création cinématographique le Marché commun. Celui-ci tenterait de corseter la production de films dans des directives « européennes » et « eurafri-caines » dont il n'est pas difficile de citer pêle-mêle quelques-unes :

Ne pas choquer M. Adenauer; ne pas faire de peine au général Speidel, éviter toute scène rappelant la Gestapo et les martyrs de la Résistance; faire plaisir au Vatican; l'Algérie, c'est la France et l'Europe c'est l'Eurafrique; vive le monde libre et la commission mac-carthyste des activités antiaméricaines, à bas les affreux espions rouges, à bas le socialisme matérialiste; vive la religion éprise d'ordre moral, à bas les athées, vive Don Camillo, à bas Peppone; vive Marie-Antoinette, à bas la Révolution française; vive Sissi et l'empereur François-Joseph d'Autriche, à bas la Commune et les Communards; montrer de bons patrons et non des ouvriers en grève pour leurs salaires; cacher

les scandales de la finance et des guerres coloniales; vanter les dactylos épousant les milliardaires, les mannequins épousant Ali Khan, les gangsters, les flics, les mitraillettes, les pépés, les Yankees débarrassant le Far-West des Peaux-Rouges; vive la bonne Compagnie du Canal de Suez, vive les généreuses compagnies de pétrole, vive Rockefeller, vive Krupp; vive les plaisirs virils de la guerre et les adjudants au grand cœur; vive les Marines et la Légion étrangère; vive le cinéma-oubli, le cinéma-opium, à bas les films qui incitent à réfléchir, etc.



UNE IMPOSTURE

Alors qu'on pourrait citer de nombreux exemples de censures, il est difficile de tolérer l'imposture qui consiste à rejeter sur les cinéastes français, sur leur absence de talent et leur incapacité, le nombre insuffisant de films traitant les sujets fondamentaux de l'heure présente : et en particulier le grand drame, souvent exaltant, passionnant, des hommes épris de vie et de bonheur en lutte avec les circonstances hostiles d'un monde où le capitalisme pourrit, même lorsqu'il paraît, ça et là, se renforcer.



UN CINEMA DIGNE DE NOTRE CULTURE

C'est à l'honneur de cinéastes de bien des pays du monde (y compris des Etats-Unis où un Mac-Carthy est l'objet de funérailles nationales, y compris de l'Espagne de Franco) que de nous donner, malgré les censures, des œuvres souvent vivifiantes et belles.

Et c'est l'honneur des professionnels qui font le cinéma français que de continuer, malgré les servitudes d'un art dominé par le commerce, la finance et les vetos de l'ordre établi, à exprimer dans quelques belles réalisations les idées et les sentiments qui, depuis des siècles, font la grandeur de la culture française.



RAYONNEMENT DU CINEMA FRANÇAIS

Aussi ne nous est-il pas indifférent que ce soit en France qu'aient été réalisés récemment *Les sorcières de Salem*, d'après la pièce d'Arthur Miller, et *Celui qui doit mourir*, metteur en scène Jules Dassin. De tout notre cœur, nous soutenons les Américains qui combattent le mac-carthysme.

Nous sommes accueillants aux hommes et aux œuvres de tous les pays quand ils nous aident à renforcer le prestige généreux du cinéma français.

Celui-ci ne crève pas sous de fausses légendes. Il vit et il rayonne grâce à des auteurs sensibles à la présence et au soutien d'un peuple — notre peuple — épris, depuis des siècles, de la dénonciation des injustices, de progrès et de la marche confiante vers un avenir à la mesure de l'homme.

« Bataille du rail nouvelle version »

Sur trois colonnes de sa première page, le Monde, daté du 7 juin dernier, nous exposait les péripéties (nous citons textuellement son titre) d'une « bataille du rail, nouvelle version ».

L'inoubliable « Bataille du Rail » de René Clément, à la gloire de la Résistance française, montrait la lutte de notre peuple pour paralyser les liaisons ferroviaires de l'armée occupante.

Dans la « bataille du rail, nouvelle version », ce sont les partisans algériens qui coupent la voie ferrée reliant Aïn-Sefra à Colomb-Béchar.

Et c'est l'armée française qui est chargée de défendre la ligne contre les partisans.

Singulier changement de situation, par rapport aux scènes du film. Quand donc le gouvernement français fera-t-il cesser cette guerre si douloureuse ? Quand acceptera-t-il de négocier en prenant en considération les aspirations nationales du peuple algérien ?

N° 2 MARS 1959
Supplément au n° 615
de l'ETINCELLE
DE BOULOGNE
50, rue Carnot, 50
BOULOGNE-
BILLANCOURT



REDIGE
ET EDITE PAR LES
COMMUNISTES
DU CINEMA

L'AIDE DEVIENT "LE FAIT DU PRINCE"

1948 : les « comités de défense du cinéma » (constitués par les auteurs, les ouvriers, les techniciens, les producteurs et les artistes unis avec les spectateurs) avaient créé

un vaste mouvement. L'Assemblée nationale, alertée par l'opinion publique, sollicitée par de nombreuses délégations saisisait le Gouvernement et votait enfin la loi du Fond de développement du Cinéma, dite « loi d'aide ».

Aujourd'hui, nantis de la constitution gaulliste, les professionnels du Cinéma découvrent amèrement que la situation est toute autre. Après des mois de fausses nouvelles, de tergiversations, de bruits contradictoires

qui ont provoqué l'ajournement de nombreuses productions et le plus important chômage que l'industrie cinématographique ait jamais connu (532 techniciens inscrits), le Gouvernement, sortant enfin du mystère dans lequel il aime à se complaire, semble sur le point de prendre sa décision.

Il déclare la loi d'aide *parafiscale*. A ce titre, elle ne dépend plus du Législatif (c'est-à-dire ce qui reste de l'Assemblée), n'a pas besoin d'être renouvelée par une nouvelle loi ou ordonnance, mais par un simple décret ministériel. (Tout ce qui est « para » est du ressort du seul Gouvernement !)

Un décret prolongerait notre loi d'aide pour six mois, c'est-à-dire jusqu'au 1^{er} juillet 1960. Et dans les trois mois à venir un nouveau décret, issu de la seule autorité ministérielle, instituerait un nouveau régime. Les « Princes qui nous gouvernent » consulteront néanmoins certain « Conseil Supérieur du Cinéma » qui fut nommé voici plusieurs années par M. Louvel, et daigneraient recevoir, séparément, les représentants des organisations professionnelles. Voilà jusqu'où va la démocratie sous la constitution gaulliste.

Mais devant la menace, la profession a retrouvé le chemin de l'union. le 23 janvier, aux Studios de Boulogne la conférence de presse organisée par le Comité de chômeurs groupait 1.50 techniciens, ouvriers, artistes, producteurs.

Travailleurs incertains du Cinéma français, chômeurs d'aujourd'hui et de demain, il nous faut comprendre les causes de nos difficultés, analyser la crise qui nous frappe : conséquence du marché commun, résultat de la concentration capitaliste qui cherche à détruire la production et la distribution indépendantes.

Il nous faudra former un large Comité de défense, lutter comme les 11 cenciés de Fives-Lille, les métallos du Morane-Saulnier, les mineurs du Borinage, tous victimes du Marché commun.

A ceux qui n'ont que la « grandeur » à la bouche et qui nous laissent dans le besoin, il nous appartient de répondre que : la grandeur du Cinéma français nous l'avons faite tous ensemble que nous la défendrons nous-mêmes et qu'une fois de plus nous l'imposerons.

Plus que jamais reste vrai l'adage

Aide-toi... le « Prince » t'aidera

Vous avez quelque chose à déclarer ?

Vous avez eu, d'abord, à **DECLARER VOS REVENUS**.

Mais, si la crise du Cinéma continue, si la loi du fonds de développement ne prend pas... un nouveau développement, si le Marché commun dans lequel on nous a fait entrer au nom de l'Europe, continue à réduire l'importance quantitative du Cinéma français, l'an prochain, vous n'aurez plus grand chose à **DECLARER**.

En attendant, vous **DECLAREZ** qu'on vous a promis la **PAIX** en **ALGERIE**, que la guerre redouble, qu'on parle d'augmenter encore les effectifs militaires.

Vous **DECLAREZ** que les prix de gros et de détail ont augmenté, que le blé, le lait, le charbon, les transports, les loyers, les P.T.T., les hôpitaux, l'eau, les cigarettes s'achètent plus cher...

Vous **DECLAREZ** que les « petits » supportent la plus grosse partie des « sacrifices » demandés.

Vous **DECLAREZ** que « les hommes nouveaux » continuent d'appliquer en les aggravant les méthodes d'autrefois, et qu'il ne suffit pas de changer les chevaux si la direction prise est mauvaise.

Toutes ces **DECLARATIONS** ne sont pas gratuites... Nous dirons même qu'elles vous coûtent cher...

Mais ces **DECLARATIONS** ne sont pas uniquement platoniques :

Les 8 et 15 Mars, vous avez l'occasion de **DECLARER** au Gouvernement ce que vous pensez de lui à l'occasion des élections municipales.

Voter pour les candidats du Gouvernement (U.N.R. - Indépendants - ou camouflés de toutes étiquettes) ce serait avaliser la politique actuelle et l'aggraver.

DECLAREZ votre opposition résolue en votant le 8 Mars pour les candidats communistes.

MARTIN.

Les Communistes ont-ils eu le tort d'avoir raison ?

En son temps nous avions dénoncé le danger du Marché commun pour l'économie et l'indépendance de la France.

Voyons aujourd'hui pourquoi notre « loi d'aide » ne sera prolongée que de 6 mois ! A cause du Marché commun...

Notre « loi d'aide » (qui servait un peu à contrebalancer l'effet désastreux des taxes et impôts qui accablent le Cinéma français) prélève sur l'exploitation des films **FRANÇAIS** et **ETRANGERS** des fonds qui sont reversés exclusivement à la **PRODUCTION FRANÇAISE**.

Une telle opération est malheureusement contraire aux engagements pris par nos gouvernants quand ils ont signé le Traité de

Rome qui institue la Communauté Economique Européenne (Marché commun).

Les Allemands, nos « partenaires », n'ont pas chez eux un système équivalent à notre loi d'aide (leurs taxes sont de 12 % contre plus de 31 % pour les nôtres).

Ils profitent donc du « Règlement » du Marché commun pour tordre le cou à un voisin dangereux.

Première conséquence du Marché commun sur le Cinéma français : empêcher le renouvellement normal et attendu de la loi d'aide.

Ne jetons pas le manche après la cognée. Luttons ensemble pour un aménagement de la loi.

LORRAIN

Cinéma Européen Cinéma des Trusts



N° 3 - Avril 1959

(Rédigé, édité et payé par les Communistes du Cinéma)

CONTRE LE CINÉMA FÉAL (*)

MONSIEUR MALRAUX est donc pour la suppression de l'Automaticité du Fonds de Développement et son remplacement par une prime à la Qualité, attribuée à certains films, dits « Films de Qualité ».

Qui décidera de la qualité ?

Quels seront les critères de qualité ?

Telles sont les deux questions qui viennent à l'esprit... D'autres suivent, naturellement :

Qui nous protégera de l'arbitraire ?

Comment empêchera-t-on les inevitables trafics ?

Il semble que dans l'entourage de M. Malraux on veuille faire du neuf à tout prix. Encore faudrait-il qu'on nous démontrât les vices du Fonds de Soutien, tel qu'il fut pratiqué au cours des dix dernières années.

L'AUTOMATICITE, GARANTIE DE LA RENTABILITE...

Tous les professionnels sont d'accord pour améliorer le fonctionnement du Fonds et la répartition des recettes.

Mais faut-il pour autant abandonner le principe de base : l'Automaticité ?

On ne rappellera jamais trop que le Fonds a été créé pour compenser l'injustice fiscale qui pénalise l'industrie du film, pour atténuer le déséquilibre provoqué sur le marché intérieur par la concurrence américaine et pour réduire les contradictions d'une industrie qui est aussi un Art.

Jusqu'à ce jour, la rentabilité de la Production française était automatiquement garantie — tant bien que mal — grâce aux quatre milliards du Fonds de Soutien (ce qui représentait 25 % environ de l'amortissement de la Production française). Vouloir supprimer l'automaticité au bénéfice d'une prime à la qualité, c'est créer les conditions propres à l'étouffement du Cinéma Français, à la diminution progressive du nombre des films produits.

LA QUANTITE, CONDITION DE LA QUALITE...

La Production française oscille entre 120 à 140 films par an. Bien sûr, tous ne sont pas de qualité égale ; mais grâce à ces 120 ou 140 films, nous sommes à peu près sûrs de compter 15 à 20 productions de qualité.

Si la quantité n'est pas une garantie de la qualité, elle en est cependant une condition. Ce n'est d'ailleurs pas une loi propre au Cinéma, elle se vérifie dans tous les domaines de la création : Edition, Peinture, Théâtre...

Bien sûr, on peut se demander si le système actuel n'encourage pas la médiocrité. Les succès remportés depuis dix ans par les films français dans les différents festivals semblent prouver le contraire.

Si l'on constate depuis deux ans une baisse de la qualité, elle s'explique précisément par les difficultés économiques de la Production cinématographique française et aussi, hélas ! par le renforcement des contraintes imposées aux créateurs à tous les échelons de la Production, de la Distribution et de l'Exploitation.

LA LIBERTE, AUTRE CONDITION DE LA QUALITE

Le maintien du système actuel de Fonds de Développement ne doit pas être notre unique ambition. Les cinéastes français sont trop concients aujourd'hui des conséquences néfastes d'un abandon progressif de leur liberté d'expression. « L'auto-censure » est devenue pour eux un réflexe. Ne serait-ce pas là ce fameux « lavage de cerveaux » dont on a tant parlé ?

La passivité n'est pas une solution : le rêve de la production indépendante américaine, ses succès auprès de notre public est un sérieux avertissement. L'évolution du public français, ses exigences, doivent nous faire réfléchir. L'échec de certains films, malgré leurs vedettes et la réputation de leurs auteurs, n'est pas fait du hasard... (Des films qui auraient certainement eu la prime à la qualité !)

Non, la « Qualité » n'est point du pouvoir d'un ministre, aussi « féal » soit-il envers le Cinéma. Nous l'arracherons dans la mesure où nous saurons arracher les conditions d'un Cinéma libre, c'est-à-dire réellement démocratique.

UNE VICTOIRE

Les élections municipales prouvent que le Parti Communiste a retrouvé son audience dans le pays : gain de municipalités, gain de pourcentage, gain de voix : un million de l'aveu même de Guy Mollet.

De nouveau l'Union des forces démocratiques s'amorce en France. C'est la caractéristique essentielle de cette consultation qui montre aussi la confiance croissante des électeurs en la gestion municipale des communistes. Les mensonges, les commentaires agressifs de la Radio et de la Télévision n'ont pu empêcher, là où les listes de Front populaire étaient constituées, 75 à 85 % des électeurs socialistes d'enfreindre les consignes de division venues d'en haut et de joindre leurs voix à celles des communistes. Souvent même, aux voix socialistes sont venus s'ajouter celles d'autres électeurs démocrates de l'U.F.D., de l'U.G.S. et même du parti radical.

Lors de sa conférence de presse, de Gaulle a voulu nier ces faits : « Moi, dit-il, je ne me mêle absolument pas de la conjoncture électorale (rites dans la salle), ce qui ne m'empêche pas de le juger ». Quel mépris ! Quelle arrogance ! « Quant à moi, a-t-il ajouté, je m'étais tenu dans une totale impartialité (!!!). Dans ces conditions il n'est pas étonnant qu'un certain nombre d'électeurs soient retournés à la « rubrique » qu'ils fréquentaient habituellement ».

Non, ce n'est l'impartialité du chef de l'Etat qui a fait voter communiste ; c'est au contraire sa politique qui a amené les électeurs à sanctionner l'action du gouvernement. Ce sont les mesures économiques au détriment de toutes les classes laborieuses et au profit du grand capital, c'est l'absence de toute solution en Algérie, que les électeurs ont commencé à condamner sévèrement.

Si la classe ouvrière trouve le chemin de son unité, si l'alliance entre toutes les victimes de la politique réactionnaire se réalise, M. de Gaulle devra désormais attacher plus d'importance et de respect à ce qu'il appelle la « foule » électorale.

Les Armes Impuissantes

QUE s'est-il passé cette semaine en Algérie ? Rien de neuf. Il y a eu comme chaque semaine de 600 à 800 morts. Chaque semaine depuis 4 ans et demi il tombe sous les balles françaises entre 600 et 800 Algériens. C'est la guerre, direz-vous. Et puis que ce sont des Algériens... S'il tombait 600 à 80 Français par jour, alors nous nous élèverions contre cette guerre, nous protesterions avec dernière énergie.

Non, nous ne sommes pas d'accord... Qu'ils soient Français ou Algériens, ces morts nous importent énormément. Nous ne sommes pas d'accord avec cette guerre. Nous, c'est-à-dire les 63 % de Français qui, à la question de l'Institut Français d'Opinion Publique : « C'EST-IL EN CE MOMENT D'UNE NEGOCIATION SUR L'ALGERIE AVEC LE FLN., ETES-VOUS POUR OU CONTRE CETTE NEGOCIATION » ont répondu OUI.

63 % des Français veulent que l'on parle un autre langage que celui des fusils, des balles et du sang versé. Ces morts inutiles, ce sang répandu, ces chances gâchées, s'il suffit à pouvoir d'un mot pour que tout cela se

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CINEMA ET POLITIQUE

Les membres de la cellule Cinéma du Parti Communiste Français - réalisateurs, opérateurs, cadres, décorateurs, monteurs, ingénieurs du son, scripts, assistants, tapissiers, peintres, projectionnistes, etc - sont heureux de vous présenter le premier numéro de ce journal.

Son rôle est de faire connaître directement aux techniciens, aux travailleurs du films, aux créateurs, nos appréciations des événements politiques nationaux et internationaux, nos opinions concernant les problèmes propres à notre métier.

Nous pensons d'ailleurs qu'il est difficile de séparer ces deux aspects.

L'attitude d'un gouvernement, d'un état, envers un secteur industriel est toujours liée à l'orientation typique donnée à l'économie nationale dans son ensemble. De même, leur attitude envers les problèmes de création est toujours liée aux idées dominantes de la classe sociale représentée en priorité dans cet état, dans ce gouvernement.

Du jour où le gouvernement gaulliste promulgua des lois anti-laïques permettant de subventionner l'Ecole Libre, le chemin logique était tracé qui devait conduire un ministre de l'information à interdire «La Religieuse».

Le critique critique

Il n'est pas facile d'esquisser son auto-portrait, surtout lorsqu'il s'agit d'un auto portrait idéal, lorsqu'il s'agit moins de dire le critique qu'on croit être que le critique qu'on voudrait essayer d'être. Même si je ne peux risquer ici qu'une définition obligatoirement personnelle du critique communiste que ceux qui me connaissent ne s'étonnent donc pas de traits de divergence, de non-ressemblance avec le modèle tracé. Il est rare d'être ce que l'on voudrait être.

Le critique communiste ne peut que se différencier (ce qui ne veut pas dire obligatoirement s'opposer de façon antagoniste) par rapport aux autres critiques, non-communistes. Il ne peut que se différencier, et pas

Albert CERVONI, critique de cinéma à France-Nouvelle, expose ici ses principes.

seulement par les options politiques qu'il prend sur les films et dans la vie, mais se différencier aussi par la conception qu'il se fait de la culture. Son objectivité elle-même, si indispensable qu'elle soit, ne saurait lui suffire. Etre pour les films anti-fascistes, contre les films fascistes est - si l'on s'arrête là - un peu trop facile. Il faut savoir aussi, tenter au moins, déchiffrer l'information que peut apporter un film «de droite». Il faut aussi dépasser un sociologisme étroit qui, dans ce domaine a souvent consisté à justifier le sujet, à le privilégier au détriment de la forme entendue au sens réel, celui d'une méthode formelle conduisant au contenu définitif de l'oeuvre. En France plus particulièrement où le cinéma immédiatement politique

Si parmi nous il en est qui ne se sentaient pas concernés par les lois anti-laïques et voyaient mal que l'esprit rétrograde enfantant ces lois s'étendrait aussi aux domaines de la pensée et de l'art, ils se trompaient.

Dès que le pouvoir gaulliste s'avéra, de notre point de vue, exprimer le pouvoir des monopoles, le chemin logique était tracé d'une politique économique devant satisfaire avant tout les appétits monopolistes. C'est pourquoi il transforme les petites et moyennes entreprises indépendantes en entreprises dépendantes, sous-traitantes ; il néglige, sacrifie, ou brade des secteurs industriels ne paraissant pas, au niveau des monopoles et du capitalisme d'état, sources d'un profit maximum : constructions navales, mines, cinéma, et, à fortiori, il s'oppose aux revendications des ouvriers, des employés.

Si parmi nous, il en est qui crurent qu'un ministre cultivé pouvait promouvoir une politique culturelle originale, dynamique, souhaitée, au sein d'un gouvernement d'inspiration monopoliste, ils se trompaient. Car il n'est pas dans la nature des monopolistes de se préoccuper du cœur et de l'esprit des hommes, de travailler à leur épanouissement par l'art et la culture. De leur point de vue, les hommes ne sont que des producteurs d'objet (en leur raflant une plus-value au passage) et des consommateurs de ces objets (en leur raflant une imposition au passage). Et si l'art et la culture continuent leur perpétuel renouvellement, c'est qu'il est dans la nature des hommes de rechercher entre eux des points de contact de plus en plus profonds, d'aspirer à un enrichissement mutuel. Mais on peut dire que dans son mouvement essentiel, le capital se désintéresse des phénomènes de la pensée créatrice, qu'il ne lève pas le moindre guichet pour les aider. En fait, il présente qu'ils lui sont généralement hostiles, ou le deviendront, puisqu'ils sont exprimés en dehors de sa compétence directe.

Mais comme il faut bien faire quelque chose dans ce sens, le ministère gaulliste de la culture exalte les œuvres du passé - ce qui est à faire -

Le Critique Critique

est rarissime, (« La guerre est finie », « Joli mai » ou « Le Fort du Fou » ne sont que des exceptions qui confirment la règle), plus généralement dans nos sociétés de capitalisme avancé où tant d'arêtes, d'aspérités sociales ont vu leurs apparences estompées.

Le critique communiste se devra de retrouver une ligne de critique politique à propos de films dont le profil politique et même social risque de ne pas être net. Je crois que là MARX est d'un grand appui, c'est lui

Humanisme et mystification.

qui a écrit comment le capitalisme satisfaisait certes certains besoins culturels du public mais en fabricant aussi la grossièreté de ces besoins. Un film répondant à la grossièreté des besoins fabriqués par la société capitaliste est donc une pièce aussi probante dans le dossier d'accusation de la bourgeoisie qu'un film ouvertement réactionnaire sur le plan politique. Pour des films au contraire plus qu'estimables dans leur principe, notre exigence critique ne doit pas pencher aux concessions. Prenons un exemple aigu : celui de Godard, je crois pour ma part que le « Mépris » est un chef-d'œuvre sur l'aliénation de la culture sur l'argent, je crois que « Alphaville » est à la fois une confession d'importance sur l'angoisse de certains intellectuels devant un processus actuel de deshumanisation dans les sociétés capitalistes avancées, devant l'aggravation à attendre de ce processus si l'on n'y prend pas garde et un film confus qui élève cette angoisse à une dimension métaphysique rejoignant la métaphysique « scientifique » de « Planète », les mythes mystificateurs qui ont engendré la notion de « société industrielle » (je renvoie à la lecture de mon ami, l'économiste Barjonet) et non de société capitaliste ou socialiste à l'âge industriel, atomique, cybernétique. Le matin des magiciens technocrates passe aussi par cette Alphaville où l'on dépêche un envoyé spécial du « Figaro - Pravda ».

Toute acquisition formelle est bénéfique. Le talent est toujours bénéfique. Même dans une œuvre contestable il apporte quelque chose, il contredit justement - s'il est un talent authentique, pas une simple coquetterie formaliste - ce qu'il faut contester. Le travelling est affaire de morale, a dit Godard. Dans « Masculin-Féminin » je crois qu'il lui a fallu beaucoup de talent, c'est-à-dire de lucidité et d'intelligence pour montrer un jeune ouvrier communiste un peu rabacheur de ton

Le critique critique

pour énoncer des vérités générales apprises mais convaincu et convaincant à décrire, dans un schéma nullement schématique destiné à sa cellule, la notion de «révolution» appliquée au processus de production. La direction d'acteurs est aussi affaire de morale politique.

Reste à aborder les rapports du critique avec la création. Faut-il préciser l'évidence qui veut que le critique, s'il ne lui suffit pas d'être mondain, doit se préoccuper de savoir comment la situation économique, politique du cinéma détermine la création ? Qu'il doit en avertir le public le plus large possible ? Les structures capitalistes de la production, de la distribution, de l'exploitation, les mutations connues par ces différents secteurs conditionnent l'évolution du cinéma, sont affaires d'intérêt général. Le critique doit les connaître et les faire connaître, de même que sans être un praticien de la technique il doit s'intéresser à certaines données techniques et aux perspectives qu'elles ouvrent pour l'élargissement du registre esthétique.

Les critiques critiquent les films des créateurs et les créateurs critiquent volontiers les critiques qui les critiquent - Méfions nous les uns et les autres de la démagogie selon laquelle dans les deux camps on a parfois tendance à contester la critique individualisée, personnelle (celle du critique sur le film, celle du créateur sur le critique) en invoquant une critique publique, massive de masses qui ne s'expriment pas explicitement en la matière. Mais, pour conclure, je voudrais critiquer le terme même de créateurs. Tout le monde crée : l'auteur (réalisateur ou le scénariste), le critique (qui crée un rapport entre l'objet créé par le «créateur» et le spectateur (qui crée sa culture en agissant comme consommateur et qui élève une demande agissant sur la création artistique) mettre ces diverses créations en hiérarchie me paraît relever d'un vieil humanisme bourgeois qui réserve la création au domaine littéraire et artistique, qui sépare la culture du travail, les «intellectuels» et les autres. La critique communiste est peut-être la seule à pouvoir jouer un rôle d'avant-garde en ce domaine, la seule à pouvoir prendre conscience de la communauté d'efforts et d'intérêts des praticiens du cinéma, des critiques, du public tenant le cinéma pour un fait culturel, public qu'il nous appartient ensemble d'élargir. A faire prendre conscience de notre UNITÉ.

Albert CERVONI

une réunion de cinéastes communistes

Notre Comité Central, organe collectif de direction du Parti Communiste Français, s'est réuni à Argenteuil au mois de Mars pour discuter de problèmes idéologiques et philosophiques et de politique culturelle.

Le but de cette réunion : approfondir et mettre plus concrètement en pratique nos décisions du XVIIIème Congrès de Mai 1964.

Les cinéastes savent comment la politique et la philosophie interviennent dans leur travail.

La politique ? Le pouvoir de De Gaulle à la tête de l'Etat des monopoles leur en donne régulièrement la preuve. Qu'est-ce qu'un Parti qui vise à la plus profonde démocratie peut proposer, à la fois pour renverser ce pouvoir et permettre une véritable vie artistique ? Telle est la question que s'est posé le Comité Central.

La philosophie ? Un débat très ouvert existe entre philosophes et en particulier entre les philosophes communistes, sur la notion d'humanisme. Que le Comité Central montre comment le marxisme est matériellement l'humanisme de notre temps, parce que le marxisme se fonde sur l'examen scientifique des problèmes sociaux, c'est à dire des destins humains, est d'une importance qu'il est à peine besoin de souligner pour le cinéma dont la vocation artistique et la vocation de masse est essentiellement humaniste.

Mais ce qui a marqué ces débats du Comité central, c'est à la fois leur largeur, leur sérénité dans la résolution qui les termine. Le tout grâce à une préparation qui est le fait de la vie de tout le parti depuis le dernier Congrès.

Par exemple le Comité Central avait fait précéder sa réunion d'une discussion de trois jours avec les philosophes communistes. Par exemple le Comité Central, tout en redressant certaines erreurs n'a

Assembled at the General Meeting of Culture on June 17th 1987, we, artists and creators from all fields, pledge our unshakeable attachment to our art and to the culture of our country, appeal to our people and to the people, artists and creators of the whole world.

A people who lets the business world dominate its imaginative cultural life condemns itself to precarious liberties. A process such as this has existed in France for years ; the fact that it is going from strength to strength makes us fear the worst.

The encouragement necessary for contemporary creation, both the outward and inward signs of the wealth of a nation, too often plays second fiddle to the demand of profitability which public and private cultural industries seek through the never-ending merchandising of culture. At the same time, the effort made by the State to preserve and develop original culture is weakening and following the same path. The waste of talents and inventions, the consequent lowering of the status of artists and interpreters add each year to the rate of unemployment which is affecting every artistic profession like to many others.

What is happening in the cinema and the theatre, on the television and the radio, in the fields of dance, music, songs and the circus, as regards plastic arts, graphism, architecture and photography, proves that it is not a question of talents — they are alive and well — but more a desire obstinately adhered to: to separate human beings into two unequal groups: on the one hand a small number whose control over property and power would endow it with artistic authority and on the other hand an immense multitude of consumers doomed to accepting standardized products which for the mostpart have come from abroad and are faceless and soulless. They would be the cultural hostages of surveys and audience numbers beyond which nothing would be permitted. In such a world, artists would be hangers-on.

Against this frightening inversion of values between money and culture, against the cynicism of the decision-makers, whoever they are, we are calling for a worldwide ethical awakening of the arts.

We claim that no nation attached to its cultural values can revive its past or shape its future without the constant discoveries of artistic creation without the liberty of confrontation, without the willingness to make of them the common good of the artists and their people.

To the grey uniformity of commercial ambitions, we oppose a rainbow of sensitivity and intelligence and a multi-faceted opening of culture to the people of the whole world.

For months now, we have been exchanging our fears and indignation, our hopes and convictions in the biggest meeting of artists that France has seen for decades and we think this, in itself, is a remarkable feat.

Today, knowing that nothing is ineluctable, we feel the time has come to voice loudly and clearly the most indefeasible demands of the artistic world.

These demands are called boldness of creation, obligation of production, burst of pluralism, willingness for national mastery, asset of a widespread public, need for international cooperation.

Boldness of creation

firstly, because in the beginning is the creator. The dealers come next — when they come. To reduce a work of art to the level of a product means to destroy it. Thus, for both the artist and the public, works of art must take precedence over money in order to free imagination from financial considerations.

Obligation of production

secondly, because obligation is a release from a free market which is too often oppressive. National obligation of production for public and private radio and television broadcasting companies ; obligation to give part of their resources to new works of art for phonogram and publishing firms, obligation to order and produce contemporary creation for subsidized firms.

Burst of pluralism

at the same time because nothing exists which is not pluralist. Pluralism of culture in the space and time of a nation, pluralism of the arts all of which should be of equal standing, pluralism of aesthetics and techniques, of tastes and colours. Pluralism which does not aim to divide but rather to decompartmentalize so that each can be himself in learning about others.

Willingness for national mastery

too and particularly of broadcasting and distribution ; for what would pluralism of creation mean if there was a monopoly of distribution independent from multinationals such as the State is a condition of equal opportunities for works of art to reach their public.

Asset of a widespread public, need for international cooperation

as well, to communicate with and to encourage. For a long time, decentralisation has expressed this French artistic tradition of the constitution of a wide circle of "connoisseurs". This real dimension of the liberty of artists must now, more than ever, be conquered.

Need for international cooperation

finally and particularly European, since the cultural identity of France which is of the utmost importance to us, is, like any other identity, all the richer because it cuts across the most varied heritages. But in order to mix, it must first exist and it is this right to the life of our cultural personality that would be threatened in a European cultural dimension where financial participation had the upper hand.

All this can and must arouse a **public and national sense of responsibility** towards culture, a new concept in Europe. A public and national sense of responsibility which would enable one to take culture out of the hands of the business world, to respond to the new challenge of outrageous segregation, to go beyond desire and pleasure, knowledge and goodwill in a society less and less anonymous. A public and national sense of responsibility which requires means and consequently demands the financial support of the State as well as contributions from cultural industries. We suggest it calls for the generalisation of support funds which would come from public credit and private profit and give priority to contemporary creation. These are, for us, the ardent demands of culture, in unison with the aspirations of our people and of people the world over.

DECLARATION OF CULTURAL RIGHTS

(adopted by the "ÉTATS GÉNÉRAUX DE LA CULTURE" on June 17th 1987 in Theatre of Paris and proclaimed on November 16th 1987 by 6000 persons in "ZENITH" in Paris).

See chapter 7, p. 276.

In the final stage of the Uruguay Round negotiations on trade in services, a stand-off developed on audiovisual services between the European Communities and the United States. This had its origins in the rise of commercial television broadcasting in Europe. In a process which initially began as a result of court rulings in Italy, during the 1980s government television monopolies were dissolved across Western Europe, commercial broadcast licences were granted and government broadcast entities were wholly or partially privatized in country after country. By 1990, the number of television channels available in EC countries had increased from 36 to 125, the obvious consequence being an explosion in the number of hours of broadcast time to be filled. Also, commercial operators were now free to bid competitively around the world for programme material, whereas government broadcasters had previously fixed - at modest levels - the prices they were willing to pay for purchased programming. That the United States, with the world's most highly developed commercial film and television industries, was in the best position to benefit from these developments was a foregone conclusion. The United States dominates world trade in audiovisual services, as far as media products such as films, television programmes and video productions are concerned, with an estimated 40 per cent of the market. However, the fastest growing market is the European Community, which has been estimated at ECU 23 billion and is expected to double by the year 2000. In 1992, United States exports of film and tape rentals, television programmes and recordings of live entertainment to the EC amounted to some \$ 3.6 billion against EC exports to the United States market of about \$ 290 million.⁷¹

This situation is perceived in Europe as an "invasion" of United States programming, owing to the sudden and unprecedented increase in demand unmatched by local productive capacity to fill it. Whereas the rising demand for programming in Europe has produced a significant increase in the importation of foreign (mainly United States) products, a similar rise in programming demand in the United States has not resulted in any increase in imports. In 1991, the United States' products accounted for almost 80 per cent of cinema screenings in the EC and for over half of all dramas and comedies broadcast on television whereas the percentage of foreign films on American television and theatre screens remains at an exceptionally low level (less than 2 per cent), although Latin American and Asian suppliers are beginning to make inroads.

⁷¹ OMSYC and IDATE reports. Estimates based on figures of the 100 largest companies in the world. Rate: 1 ECU = US\$ 1.298238.

The specific trade barriers most at issue were film subsidies and television quotas. Film production subsidies, which are nearly ubiquitous, have existed for decades and vary from country to country. France has the most substantial programme, levying an 11 per cent duty on box office sales which is funneled directly into film production support overseen by a national commission. (Revenues are also obtained by special taxes on video sales and rentals.) This system is widely credited with maintaining the viability of the French film industry, the most robust in Europe, which produces some 150 films annually, indeed, a larger number of films per capita than the United States.

In the final stages of the Uruguay Round negotiations in the autumn of 1993, it might have been thought that the status quo was proving relatively satisfactory to all parties. Film subsidies allowed European producers to assure the survival of artistically serious and culturally particular film-making. Television quotas were adopted EC-wide by a Community directive in September 1989 on “television without frontiers”, which recommended a minimum of 50 per cent programming “of European origin” on all channels. Individual countries are permitted to adopt more stringent and specific standards. The EC quota system is voluntary and reportedly has never been enforced, as imported non-European programming has not risen above 30 per cent. Consequently, the quota system did not affect the current demand for United States television programming. The concern of the United States industry would appear to be for the future. The 1989 EC directive regarding television quotas was probably more alarming to that industry as a foretaste of communal action than for the particular strictures it laid down. In 1990, MEDIA (Measures to Encourage the Development of the Industry of Audiovisual production) was established in the existing EC countries plus Austria and Switzerland. MEDIA has established a venture capital fund (Media Venture) to help finance the production and distribution of high budget commercial films and television series, the European Film Distribution Office (EFDO) to sponsor worldwide distribution of European films, and a number of other divisions devoted to dubbing and subtitling (BABEL), script development (SCRIPT), and animation (CARTOON) among other endeavours. MEDIA was created to break out of the “cottage industry” syndrome in European filmmaking and build a commercial rival to the Hollywood model. It is realized that this is only conceivable on a Community-wide scale, not at the level of a single European State.

The audiovisual service sector is a fast growing economic activity benefiting from the rising demand for entertainment. Annual growth rates of around 10 per cent in real terms have been sustained even in the recent recessionary climate. Demand has been fuelled by technical progress, deregulation and privatization and increased leisure time. At the world level, the software side of the audiovisual industry had an estimated value of roughly ECU 120 billion

in 1992. The power, scope and diversity of the new media technologies and regulatory transformation are providing a rapidly expanding choice of supply modes that is affecting the growth and development of the audiovisual industry. The new technologies provide stability in quality, multiplication of transmission possibilities, reduction of costs and creation of market overlap. Regulators are struggling to keep pace with these new media technologies and the multi-media alliances between telephony, broadcasting, computing and publishing. They are faced, in particular, with issues such as treatment of regulated monopolies, transition to open competition, ensuring a universal service, promoting the interests of domestic film and television programme industries, and tracking the transmission of audiovisual productions when no physical support is needed for such cross-border services.

Television technology is moving towards vastly increased channel capacity ("bandwidth"), interactive (or "switched") transmission networks, and new programme options such as video-on-demand and a vast array of "transaction" services such as home shopping, home banking, and so on. This emerging "information highway" Will evolve gradually over time and incorporate a complex of delivery technologies such as satellites, fiber optic cables and advanced wireless devices. It is sometimes said that new technologies like digital broadcast satellite (DBS) transmission will "erase" national or even Community-wide boundaries and render quotas and other trade and regulatory obstacles obsolete. However, it is far from clear that this is true. As the number of channels and programme offerings expands, the market becomes more fragmented and it becomes increasingly necessary to supplement advertising revenues with subscriptions, pay-per-view and other fees. Even satellite system operators need a substantial on-the-ground presence (which may be provided by a third party) to establish service, do billing and collect fees. These activities will be just as subject to governmental oversight as any other terrestrial enterprise.

The control of distribution channels is of particular importance in the audiovisual sector. Many film and media producing companies are part of groups vertically integrated into the distribution and exhibition of films in cinemas. Close control over the sequence in which films are released, both geographically and temporally, among the media allows producers to maximize the earnings on their films. Access to distribution channels is made difficult for independent competitors, through various techniques. For instance, large distributors are in a position to decide which cinemas have the right to show a film first, and often impose 'block booking' which obliges the exhibitor to take and exhibit a given series of films (a practice prohibited on antitrust grounds in the United-States). Control of distribution is also fundamental to maximize downstream revenue from video sales and television broadcast rights. An export cartel, Motion Picture Export Association of America (MPEAA), comprising 20th Century Fox, Columbia Tristar, Disney (Buena Vista), Paramount, Warner

Bros., MCA Universal, Orion and MGM/UA is now present in 50 countries of the world. These firms also control the distribution of their films and aim at doing away with intermediaries in foreign markets.⁷² Importing countries have to face up to the market power of the MPEAA. By maintaining a highly effective joint marketing and distribution system in Western Europe, helped by control of a large number of cinemas, fewer than a dozen United States distributors take 80 per cent of the box office receipts in the EC, whereas the remaining 20 per cent is supplied by over 1,000 European distributors. For film makers, the cinema phase in the lifecycle of a feature film is important not in itself but because it determines the returns during the rest of the film's exploitation cycle in the form of videocassettes, pay-TV, video-on-demand and, finally broadcasting in the open. Hence, the all-out promotion campaigns of powerful feature film makers to get their products rapidly and widely accepted at the cinema-launching phase.

A new world of strategic alliances, of co-production and co-financing of films, television programmes, electronic information and games, of joint shareholding in satellite launches and cable/telephony networks, distribution and even audience measurement, has come into being. Media conglomerates and small niche players in telecommunications, film and cable are teaming up with others in different parts of the world to meet the rising and diversifying demands of viewers.⁷³

As a result of the emergence of the new information technologies the stakes may be higher than the image of television shows and motion pictures would immediately suggest. The national mandate for the 'information infrastructure' as set forth by the United States Administration envisions these technologies as supporting and directly stimulating a large part of the industrial, scientific and commercial enterprise of the next few decades. Scientific research, medical diagnosis, industrial planning and development, financial services of all types, professional consulting, 'telecommuting' — these and many more activities that add up to a large proportion of the total economic activity of a modern nation — are projected as taking place 'over the network.' Entertainment programming is only a part of the whole, but

⁷² Financial and creative links between Hollywood studios and European and Japanese firms have been increasing. MCA and Columbia/Tristar are owned by Matsushita and Sony, respectively. United States companies are established in Europe both in production of films and television programmes (United Artist companies are established in Europe both in production of films and television programmes (United Artist European Holding, owned by TCI) and in distribution (United International Pictures (UIP), incorporated in the Netherlands, is a joint venture between MGM/UA, Paramount and MCA Universal for film distribution all over the world except North America). The reverse is more rare but, for instance, Credit Lyonnais owns the Hollywood studio MGM/UA; and Philips has substantial interests in United States audiovisual firms.

⁷³ Production of audiovisual services resembles manufacturing in the sense that it ends with a physical product composed of labour and capital inputs. Practically all the costs incurred in making the product accrue in turning out the first copy of the film, video or broadcast. Additional copies can be made inexpensively. These production characteristics explain the search for control of the distribution of the product notably through ownership of distribution networks. Such control allows distributors/exhibitors to favour their own products, thus limiting the choice of products available to buyers.

it is widely seen by government and industrial planners as the one that can best and most immediately help to finance the development of the expensive infrastructure needed to support the whole system. In other words, the revenues generated by new entertainment services could become a kind of general tax to finance the construction of a wholly new industrial infrastructure. Under the circumstances, it is easy to understand why no country would wish to surrender control of this sector to foreign competition without at least having a better perception of what role it might play in the more general economic future.

Source: The Outcome of the Uruguay Round: An Initial Assessment. Supporting Papers to the Trade and Development Report, 1994, Box 16, United Nations, New York, 1994, pp. 162-164.

Letter from French producer Anatole Dauman to Minister for Culture Catherine Trautmann

Madame Catherine Trautmann
Ministre de la Culture
3, rue de Valois
75003 PARIS

A Paris, le 9 juin 1997

Madame le Ministre,

Votre volonté maintes fois réaffirmée de défendre l'Europe contre l'empire hollywoodien vous destinait naturellement à poursuivre ce combat dont l'issue est aussi vitale pour le public que pour les professionnels du spectacle. Je me félicite donc tout particulièrement de votre nomination à la tête du Ministère de la Culture.

Vous m'avez fait l'honneur de m'écouter - durant plus d'une heure - dans ma défense d'un cinéma *pluriel* pour lequel je lute âprement - en France et à l'étranger - depuis de nombreuses années. Je suis d'autant plus heureux de votre arrivée au sein du gouvernement de Lionel Jospin que celui-ci a placé son action sous le signe de la moralité publique, de l'impartialité et de l'intérêt général. Je ne doute pas dans ces nouvelles conditions que les spectateurs de cinéma pourront enfin accéder à la plus grande diversité de films possible.

Déjà, Madame le Ministre, vous avez fait savoir - c'est ce que dit en tout cas la presse - que vous avez " l'intention de réagir " à l'éventuelle décision positive concernant le multiplexe de l'Aquaboulevard. Cette réaction est d'autant plus nécessaire que nous savons aujourd'hui que les multiplexes ont encore aggravé la situation du cinéma européen et donc français, la remontée de la fréquentation bénéficiant presque exclusivement au cinéma hollywoodien. À titre d'exemple, citons les statistiques de l'observatoire de Strasbourg consacrées à la Grande-Bretagne : 90% des spectateurs reconquis grâce à la construction des multiplexes (soit une centaine de millions en cinq ans) ont contribué au seul succès des films américains (et l'on peut dire que leur part de marché reflète largement, dans nos pays, l'exportation du chômage de l'industrie hollywoodienne).

Ainsi, me semble-t-il, les arguments mercantiles des défenseurs des multiplexes sont définitivement balayés.

19, rue Pomereu - 75016 Paris

See chapter 7, pp. 274 & 293.

De surcroît et comme je le soutiens depuis l'origine, la multiplication des salles dans un même endroit impose capitalistiquement une programmation aussi homogène que possible donc, hollywoodienne ou conforme à ce modèle (*Le Cinquième Élément*).

Le combat pour la liberté de création et le pluralisme est le même à tous les niveaux, de la production à la distribution et à l'exportation. Si nous en doutions, Nicolas SEYDOUX, patron de GAUMONT, est venu le confirmer lorsqu'il s'est exprimé sur l'amendement Sautt-Elhier : "Cette loi, dit-il sans ambages, est une catastrophe". Pour Gaumont ou pour les spectateurs de cinéma ?

Votre décision va donc susciter un grand espoir : grand espoir, d'abord, d'y voir les prémises d'une révision des détestables *Lois Carignon* qui ont autorisé les titulaires des marchés de l'État à être en même temps à la tête des plus puissants instruments de communication. L'intégrité exige en effet qu'il soit mis fin à cette dangereuse confusion des genres : grand espoir, également, de voir enfin la renaissance du cinéma européen donc français. Cette renaissance ne saurait passer par des mesures de caractère temporaire ou de nature artificielle comme de nouvelles croisades pour de nouveaux quotas ou la mise en place de prétendus "Codes de bonnes conduites" dont les effets sont aussi pervers - à distance - que la fausse bonne idée de la multiplication des écrans.

La réflexion que j'ai pu conduire avec l'aide de grands experts aussi qualifiés que Monsieur Jacques Flaud, ancien Directeur du CNC et Monsieur le professeur Dominique Brault, a permis de suggérer une réforme que mon ami, le regretté Conseiller d'État Bordaz a fini de rédiger, peu avant sa disparition, sous la forme d'un projet de proposition de loi que vous voudrez bien trouver ci-après. Son adoption permettrait de faire un grand pas pour la défense de notre cinéma européen certes, au plus grand détriment de la pensée totalitaire et de ses serviteurs, mais au profit de nos concitoyens.

Je vous prie, Madame, de bien vouloir recevoir l'expression de mes hommages les plus respectueux.

Anatole Dauman

PS : *Le Monde* du 30 mai 1997 souligne sous la plume de Jean-Michel Frodon qu'en règle générale : "L'argent européen contribue au financement d'Hollywood".

Financial globalization increases economic insecurity and social inequalities. It bypasses and undermines popular decision-making, democratic institutions, and sovereign states responsible for the general interest. In their place, it substitutes a purely speculative logic that expresses nothing more than the interests of multinational corporations and financial markets.

In the name of a transformation of the world depicted as a natural law, citizens and their representatives find their decision-making power contested. Such a humiliating proof of impotence encourages the growth of anti-democratic parties. It is urgent to block this process by creating new instruments of regulation and control, at the national, European, and international levels. Experience clearly shows that governments will not do so without encouragement. Taking up the double challenge of social implosion and political desperation thus requires a dramatic increase in civic activism.

The total freedom of capital circulation, the existence of tax havens, and the explosion of the volume of speculative transactions have forced governments into a frantic race to win the favor of big investors. Every day, one hundred billion dollars pass through the currency markets in search of instant profits, with no relation to the state of production or to trade in goods and services. The consequences of this state of affairs are the permanent increase of income on capital at the expense of labor, a pervasive economic insecurity, and the growth of poverty.

The social consequences of these developments are even more severe for dependent countries that are directly affected by the financial crisis and are subjected to the dictates of the IMF's adjustment plans. Debt service requires governments to lower social service budgets to a minimum and condemn societies to underdevelopment. Interest rates much higher than in the countries of the North contribute to the destruction of national producers; uncontrolled privatization and denationalization develop in the search for the resources demanded by investors.

Everywhere social rights are called into question. Where there are public retirement systems, workers are asked to replace them by a pension fund mechanism that subjects their own employers to the sole imperatives of immediate profitability, extends the sphere of influence of finance, and persuades citizens of the obsolescence of institutions of solidarity between nations, peoples, and generations. Deregulation affects the labor market as a whole, and the

results include degradation of working conditions, the growth of workplace insecurity and unemployment, and the dismantling of systems of social protection.

Using economic development and job creation as a pretext, the major powers have not given up plans for a Multilateral Agreement on Investments (MAI) which would give the investors all the rights and leave national governments with all the responsibilities. Under the pressure of public opinion and mobilization of activists, they had to abandon plans to negotiate this agreement in the framework of the OECD, but discussions will resume in the framework of the World Trade Organization. At the same time the USA as well as the European Commission continue their free trade crusade, pushing for the creation of new zones of deregulation at the continental or intercontinental level (the PET project between Europe and North America, the extension of NAFTA into Latin America, etc.)

There is still time to put the brakes on most of these machines for creating inequalities between North and South as well as in the heart of the developed countries themselves. Too often, the argument of inevitability is reinforced by censorship of information about alternatives. Thus international financial institutions and the major media (whose owners are often beneficiaries of globalization) have been silent about the proposal of the American economist and Nobel Laureate James Tobin, to tax speculative transactions on currency markets. Even at the particularly low rate of 0.1%, the Tobin Tax would bring in close to \$100 billion every year. Collected for the most part by industrialized countries, where the principal financial markets are located, this money could be used to help struggle against inequalities, to promote education and public health in poor countries, and for food security and sustainable development. Such a measure fits with a clearly antispeculative perspective. It would sustain a logic of resistance, restore maneuvering room to citizens and national governments, and, most of all, would mean that political, rather than financial considerations are returning to the fore.

To this end, signatories propose to participate or to cooperate with the international movement ATTAC to debate, produce and disseminate information, and act together, in their respective countries as well as on the continental and international levels. This joint actions have the following goals:

- * to hamper international speculation;
- * to tax income on capital;
- * to penalize tax havens;
- * to prevent the generalization of pension funds;
- * to promote transparency in investments in dependant countries;

- * to establish a legal framework for banking and financial operations, in order not to penalize further consumers and citizens; the employees of banking institutions can play an important role in overseeing these operations;
- * to support the demand for the general annulment of the public debt of dependent countries, and the use of the resources thus freed in behalf of populations and sustainable development, which many call paying off the "social and ecological debt."

More generally, the goals are:

- * to reconquer space lost by democracy to the sphere of finance, to oppose any new abandonment of national sovereignty on the pretext of the "rights" of investors and merchants,
- * to create democratic space at the global level.

It is simply a question of taking back, together, the future of our world.

Platform of the international movement ATTAC — International movement for democratic control of financial markets and their institutions —, adopted at the international meeting of 11-12 December, 1998.

LE BLOC

Bureau de Liaison des Organisations du Cinéma

Qui ?

Les réalisateurs, les auteurs, les producteurs, les distributeurs, les artistes-interprètes, les exploitants indépendants, les techniciens.

Quoi ?

Faire «bloc» pour défendre les indépendants de toute la chaîne de la création cinématographique.

Comment ?

Initier débats et réflexions, formuler des propositions, orienter la politique cinématographique.

Pourquoi ?

Parce que l'existence d'un pôle indépendant fort est la condition du renouvellement des talents et de la pérennité du cinéma.

LE BLOC

Bureau de Liaison des Organisations du Cinéma

Le pluralisme de la création est la condition du renouvellement et de la pérennité du cinéma.

Plus que jamais, parce que les mutations de notre secteur sont rapides et brutales, ce pluralisme doit être garanti et replacé au cœur du cinéma.

A cette fin, la création cinématographique se regroupe sous la bannière du BLOC, Bureau de Liaison des Organisations du Cinéma.

La mission du BLOC est de garantir la liberté artistique, l'indépendance et la diversité du cinéma.

LE BLOC

Créer un pôle indépendant fort

L'audiovisuel connaît depuis ces dernières années une profonde mutation qui se matérialise par l'arrivée massive de grands groupes industriels et financiers dans ce qui fut l'industrie de l'audiovisuel, et devient l'industrie de la communication.

La présence de ces nouveaux opérateurs se traduit par la multiplication des canaux de diffusion. Elle se traduit également par une augmentation de la fréquentation en salles.

Elle ne génère pas pour autant un volume de production équivalent.

On assiste ainsi à une situation paradoxale où l'augmentation mécanique de la demande de films de cinéma se heurte à l'incapacité du système de répondre à cette demande.

Si cette situation perdure, la multiplication des canaux de diffusion qui devrait être en principe synonyme de concurrence et de transparence, signifiera standardisation et disparition des œuvres de création au profit de produits. C'est l'avenir du cinéma qui est menacé.

Le cinéma est une industrie, c'est aussi une culture, une identité qui repose sur les œuvres des créateurs.

C'est pourquoi la création d'un pôle industriel fort ne suffit pas à assurer la vitalité de l'industrie du cinéma. Pas plus qu'elle ne suffit à subvenir aux besoins en films de l'industrie audiovisuelle.

La concentration est un trait dominant de notre économie. Elle doit être encadrée car c'est l'indépendance des opérateurs cinématographiques qui est fragile et menacée.

Assurer la vitalité du cinéma, comme répondre à la demande de films, suppose l'existence d'un pôle indépendant fort pour toutes les composantes de la chaîne cinématographique.

Garantir la liberté d'expression artistique, l'indépendance de la production et de la distribution, la pluralité de l'exploitation

Un tel pôle doit offrir les conditions fondamentales de la création cinématographique : liberté d'expression artistique, indépendance de la production et de la distribution, pluralité de l'exploitation.

Liberté d'expression artistique : c'est la condition du renouvellement des talents, ce qui fait la force et la pérennité de la création. Sans elle, c'est la source même du cinéma qui se tarit.

Indépendance de la production : c'est la garantie de la diversité et de la richesse de la création. C'est aussi la garantie d'une production suffisante en nombre pour répondre aux besoins croissants de films. La pluralité de la production doit tendre vers l'objectif d'un développement massif de la production.

Indépendance de la distribution : la concentration dans le secteur de la distribution est telle que celle-ci ne répond plus à sa mission de diffusion des films auprès des publics du cinéma. La distribution est aujourd'hui le maillon faible de l'industrie du cinéma.

Pluralité de l'exploitation : c'est la garantie d'une diffusion étendue et diversifiée de tous les films de cinéma. Si l'exploitation est aujourd'hui en pleine croissance et se dirige de toute évidence vers les 200 millions d'entrées par an, la pluralité de la programmation est quant à elle menacée.

Liberté d'expression artistique, indépendance de la production et de la distribution, pluralité de l'exploitation font et feront l'originalité, la richesse et la vitalité des cinémas français et européens.

La mission du BLOC est de promouvoir et de faire respecter ces principes.

Le BLOC se propose d'en être le représentant auprès des pouvoirs publics, des institutions et des opérateurs du secteur.

Le BLOC est ouvert à toutes les organisations représentant les acteurs indépendants du cinéma.

Fonctionnement du BLOC

- 1- Le BLOC regroupe les organisations représentatives de la création cinématographique.
- 2- Le BLOC est le garant de l'indépendance de la création cinématographique auprès des pouvoirs publics, des organismes et institutions du secteur.
- 3- Les propositions du BLOC sont définies consensuellement.
- 4- Chaque organisation membre du BLOC conserve son autonomie d'action et d'expression.
- 5- Le BLOC se réunit sur convocation des coprésidents aussi souvent que nécessaire et au moins une fois par mois.
- 6- Le BLOC est coprésidé par un réalisateur et un producteur. Leur mandat est d'un an, non renouvelable.
- 7- Le BLOC est composé des représentants de chaque organisation membre, ainsi que des deux coprésidents. Chaque organisation membre désigne un représentant qui est nécessairement un professionnel actif.
- 8- Le secrétariat général du BLOC est assuré par les délégués générales de la SRF et de l'UPF. Le siège du BLOC est situé à l'UPF, 18 rue de Vienne 75008 Paris.

Le 15 juin 1998

Article 128

1. The Community shall contribute to the flowering of the cultures of the Member States, while respecting their national and regional diversity and at the same time bringing the common cultural heritage to the fore.
2. Action by the Community shall be aimed at encouraging cooperation between Member States and, if necessary, supporting and supplementing their action in the following areas:
 - Improvement of the knowledge and dissemination of the culture and history of the European peoples;
 - Conservation and safeguarding of cultural heritage of European significance;
 - non-commercial cultural exchanges;
 - artistic and literary creation, including the audiovisual sector.
3. The Community and the Member States shall foster cooperation with third countries and the competent international organizations in the sphere of culture, in particular the Council of Europe.
4. The Community shall take cultural aspects into account in its action under other provisions of this Treaty.
5. In order to contribute to the achievement of the objectives referred to in this Article, the Council:
 - acting in accordance with the procedure referred to in Article 189b and after consulting the Committee of the Regions, shall adopt incentive measures, excluding any harmonization of the laws and regulations of the Member States. The Council shall unanimously throughout the procedures referred to in Article 189b.
 - acting unanimously on a proposal from the Commission, shall adopt recommendation.

Council of the European Communities, Commission of the European Communities, Official Publications, Treaty of Maastricht, 1992, p. 48.

See chapters 5, p. 180 & 7. p. 298.



VICTOIRE DE LA CULTURE CONTRE LE MARCHÉ

Déclaration de Aline Pailler
porte parole du groupe confédéral GUE/NGL

L'examen de la directive "Télévision sans Frontières" constituait un enjeu de civilisation. Allions-nous par notre vote prendre la responsabilité de dire au monde que nous abandonnions notre culture, nos images, nos histoires- peut-être un jour notre Histoire- nos mythes ? La réponse est claire : en adoptant à une large majorité les amendements de sa commission culture, le Parlement européen s'est prononcé pour la promotion des oeuvres européennes et l'obligation des quotas minimum de diffusion dans les Etats membres sans clause échappatoire, pour l'élargissement du champ d'application de la directive en y incluant les nouveaux services, (notamment la vidéo à la demande), pour la limitation de la publicité et du télé achat.

Par ce vote, auquel le groupe confédéral GUE/NGL a largement contribué, le Parlement européen a exprimé sa volonté de promouvoir la culture européenne, de défendre son pluralisme contre l'uniformisation dans le respect de nos identités culturelles.

Ce vote constitue un échec pour les majors d'Hollywood qui occupent déjà 80% des programmes télévisés en Europe et ont un excédent commercial de près de 6 milliards d'Écus avec l'Union européenne. Le Parlement européen s'oppose aux délocalisations et renforce les moyens juridiques d'application et de contrôle de la directive dans les Etats membres.

C'est une victoire contre la marchandisation de la culture. Une victoire de l'intelligence, une victoire de l'homme contre le marché.

Avec ce vote, qui répond aux exigences des artistes et créateurs, le Parlement européen a adressé un signal fort et clair au Conseil qui doit revoir son compromis très insuffisant et dangereux du 20 novembre 1995 en reprenant les amendements votés en première lecture.

Strasbourg, le 14 février 1996

See chapter 7, p. 298.

DECLARATION DE MADAME ALINE PAILLER

"Télévision Sans Frontières" : La culture sacrifiée au marché.

Le conseil culture du 11 juin 1996 a conclu un accord sur la directive "Télévision Sans Frontières"

J'apprends avec déception et inquiétude que le gouvernement français accepte sans réserves officielles un compromis minimum qui certes, permet une deuxième lecture au Parlement Européen dans le cadre de la co-décision, mais renonce, malgré le vote largement majoritaire du Parlement européen du 13 février, à l'obligation stricte de diffusion d'oeuvres européennes.

Entre autres inquiétudes, l'abandon d'une réglementation fondée sur les lois du pays récepteur, ce qui permet à des chaînes de s'installer dans un pays de l'Union dont la réglementation est faible pour arroser tous les autres pays.

Enfin, les nouveaux services (comme la vidéo à la demande) sont exclus du champ d'application de la directive.

Après toutes les déclarations du Ministre Philippe DOUSTE-BLAZY dans ce processus de révision de la directive "T.S.F." depuis 2 ans, on pouvait espérer une position plus offensive et plus ferme du gouvernement français. Il pouvait s'appuyer sur le vote du Parlement Européen avec au minimum, des réserves clairement formulées comme l'a fait l'Italie ou encore une abstention à l'image de la position belge, hellénique et irlandaise.

Ne peut-on pas craindre dans cette reculade que la culture soit malgré les déclarations, la monnaie d'échange de compromis sur d'autres dossiers communautaires d'actualité ?

Que reste-t-il de l'exception culturelle ?

Des luttes à mener avec les professionnels et les citoyens ainsi que des exigences à l'égard de nos gouvernements afin que la deuxième lecture au Parlement Européen puis la procédure de conciliation aient quelques chances d'aboutir et à un renforcement de la création et de la diffusion des productions audiovisuelles et cinématographiques européennes.

Aline PAILLER

Députée Européenne

Membre de la commission culture,

éducation, jeunesse, média, sport

Vice-Présidente de l'intergroupe cinéma

Strasbourg le 12 novembre 1996.

TÉLÉVISION SANS FRONTIÈRE : LA CULTURE A GENOUX FACE AU MARCHÉ.

Déclaration de Aline Pailler après le vote du Parlement européen

A cause du mécanisme de codécision prévu par le Traité de Maastricht, la majorité simple ne suffit pas en deuxième lecture pour amender la position du Conseil. C'est ainsi qu'avec 291 voix contre 170, 15 abstentions et 150 députés absents, le Parlement Européen n'a pas pu éviter la clause échappatoire à l'obligation des quotas de diffusion "chaque fois que c'est réalisable" ainsi que les oeuvres de plateau comptabilisées dans les quotas.

La Parlement européen a également refusé l'inclusion des nouveaux services (tels la vidéo à la demande) dans le champ d'application de la directive ainsi que les mesures de sauvegarde proposées par notre groupe et soutenues par 29 autres députés contre les délocalisations qui permettent aux groupes audiovisuels "pirates" de s'installer dans les pays les moins réglementés pour arroser les pays limitrophes sans respecter les quotas ou les règles régissant la publicité ou la protection des mineurs.

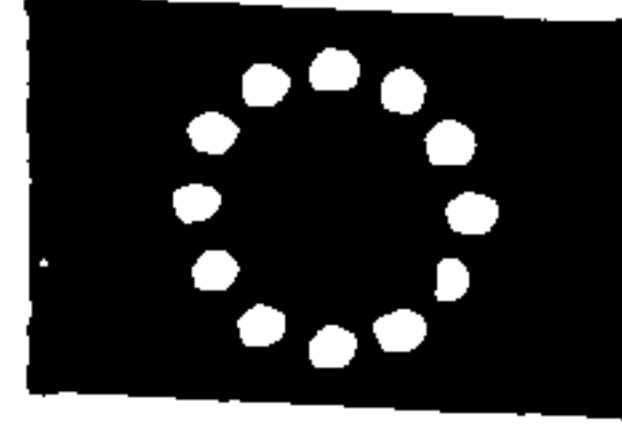
Sur cette clause antidélocalisation, le Parlement Européen prend le contre-pied de sa première lecture en refusant de s'engager clairement pour la promotion des oeuvres européennes et s'est soumis à la loi du marché.

N'est-ce pas aujourd'hui la victoire par défaut de ceux qui ont répondu aux attentes et aux désirs clairement exprimés par Jack VALENTI et l'industrie Hollywoodienne? A ce titre, les chaînes commerciales de type "Berlusconien" peuvent dire "merci" au puissant lobby Hollywoodien!

Notre groupe est décidé à poursuivre son action avec les artistes, les créateurs, les professionnels de l'audiovisuel et leurs organisations contre la marchandisation de la culture, pour la promotion du pluralisme culturel en Europe.

Au-delà des professionnels, cela concerne tous les citoyens d'Europe : c'est une question de civilisation. Malheureusement, le Conseil, la Commission et la majorité du Parlement Européen sont restés sourds à ces enjeux!

Que la culture passe après les enjeux économiques, ce n'est pas nouveau, mais cette fois-ci, les conséquences en seront plus graves pour sa production car nous sommes dans la perspective de la mise en place des autoroutes de l'information et des grandes manoeuvres du multimédia qui seront au centre des futures négociations O.M.C (ex G.A.T.T).



DÉPUTÉ AU PARLEMENT EUROPEEN

Communiqué de presse
de la présidente de la Commission de la Culture
Luciana Castellina

LA MAJORITE N'EST PAS SUFFISANTE.

La grande majorité des députés présents dans l'hémicycle (plus de 120 voix de différence) a voté en faveur des amendements à la position commune adoptées par les Conseil des Ministres pour la révision de la directive TV sans frontières proposés par la Commission de la Culture du Parlement Européen (et largement partagés par la Commission exécutive).

Le mécanisme antidémocratique prévu par le Traité de Maastricht, qui entre en oeuvre quand il s'agit de textes législatifs, et qui est pourtant appelé "co-décision", a à nouveau empêché que l'orientation majoritaire du Parlement Européen se traduise dans les actes.

En effet les amendements, pour être adoptés, doivent obtenir la majorité absolue non pas des députés présents mais de ceux qui ont le droit de voter, un pourcentage qui -en considérant la proportion normale des absents-, ne peut être obtenu que pour les arguments "incolores" et "indolores".

Ce n'est pas le cas de la directive TVSF pour laquelle se sont mobilisés les puissants lobby's qui opèrent dans le domaine des télécommunications; les propriétaires de chaînes commerciales, (qui préfèrent acheter à bas prix des programmes de fiction américains plutôt que dans la production européenne); et les "majors" de Hollywood (le déficit de nos échanges audiovisuels avec les EU est déjà de 6,2 milliards de dollars). Toutes de forces qui ne se préoccupent pas de garantir à la culture européenne les conditions de sa survie sur un marché global qui ne préserve aucune diversité et ne récompense que les productions qui participent d'un oligopole mondial.

Malgré les efforts pour atteindre des compromis au sein de la Commission de la Culture, qui avaient donné des résultats positifs en son sein, le vote d'aujourd'hui a fait prévaloir la position d'une minorité qui a imprimé un coup d'arrêt à la lutte pour faire vivre l'identité de l'Europe, sa mémoire, ses images, sans lesquels elle risque de perdre sa raison d'être.

See chapter 7, p. 298.

Regard d'Europe

*"Pour être heureux il faut simplement y voir clair
Et lutter sans défaut" (Paul Eluard)*

N° 2 juin-juillet 1998

EDITORIAL



Le N° 2 de REGARD D'EUROPE ne devait faire que quatre pages (comme le premier). Eh bien, ce sera à nouveau un huit pages! * En effet, contrairement aux propos de l'ancien ministre des affaires européennes du gouvernement Juppé, Michel Barnier (France- Inter le 6 juillet 1998), un élu européen, "ça" sert à quelque chose, "ça" prépare et "ça" vote le budget, "ça" participe à la construction européenne même si c'est pour lui donner un autre sens que celui du libéralisme, "ça" parcourt l'Europe et les régions de France (pas seulement la sienne !), justement parce qu'il est l'élu de toute la France. Je suis donc satisfaite que Lionel Jospin ait renoncé à son projet de régionalisation du scrutin européen : nous éviterons ainsi le clientélisme, véritable ennemi d'un projet européen. Maintenant, il faut travailler les questions de fond posées par la construction européenne :

- monnaie unique et ses effets
- construction d'une Europe sociale
- institutions démocratiques
- traité d'Amsterdam
- élargissement

Ces questions sont cruciales, urgentes et ne sont simples pour aucun des partis. Mais, si elles faisaient l'objet d'un débat national et européen, l'enjeu des élections de juin 1999 n'échapperait pas aux citoyens et les motiverait sans nul doute.

Huit pages, ce sera donc encore insuffisant pour répondre à Jacques Delors (ancien président de la Commission) qu'il y a plus intéressant pour les électeurs que sa trouvaille d'axer toute la campagne des européennes sur le choix du futur président de la Commission : une "finale" entre F. Gonzales et un chrétien- démocrate !

Je veux bien croire qu'une telle indigence ne sert en fait qu'à masquer les véritables enjeux qui sont aussi de véritables défis pour les douze gouvernements à direction ou participation socialiste ou social-démocrate de l'Union Européenne.

Et si l'on pariait ensemble sur l'intelligence et le courage politique!

Aline PAILLER.

* Au moment de la mise en page, ce n'est plus huit pages mais douze !

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CULTURE

QUELLE POLITIQUE CULTURELLE EN EUROPE ?

La culture était absente en tant que politique communautaire jusqu'au Traité de Maastricht. Cela n'empêchait pas la Commission de traiter les produits culturels comme des marchandises dans le cadre du marché unique et de leur appliquer les règles de la concurrence. L'article 128 du Traité de Maastricht a ouvert timidement la porte d'une politique culturelle en respectant la complémentarité des politiques nationales et de la politique européenne : "La Communauté contribue à l'épanouissement des cultures des Etats membres dans le respect de leur diversité nationale et régionale, tout en mettant en évidence l'héritage culturel commun". La voie était ouverte à des actions dans le domaine culturel ; malgré les efforts du Parlement européen (je peux témoigner de la volonté majoritaire exprimée à la commission de la culture), les crédits communautaires consacrés à la culture sont restés très faibles avec 0,03 % du budget total .

La Commission semble aujourd'hui décidée à donner un coup de pouce à cette politique culturelle en proposant un véritable programme-cadre communautaire doté d'un budget de 167 millions d'écus pour la période 2000-2004. Pour que cette opération ne soit pas de la poudre aux yeux, il faut obtenir des engagements sur le financement et lancer une large consultation des professionnels parallèlement au débat qui sera mené au Parlement européen. Cette consultation devrait permettre de définir les actions à mettre en oeuvre en évitant le saupoudrage clientéliste. En même temps, la mise en oeuvre de ce programme-cadre devrait être complétée par l'intégration d'un volet culturel dans les autres politiques européennes comme l'éducation, la politique sociale, l'aménagement du territoire.

A côté de la sélection officielle, des stars et de la montée des marches du Palais des festivals, **Cannes c'est aussi ça !**

- Un jury de cheminots spécialement invité pour voir les films de la "Semaine de la critique" et, au final, remettant leur récompense " le rail d'or".
- 30 films de cinéastes algériens (dont le formidable " la moitié du ciel d'Allah" de Djamilia Sahraoui) invités par la CCAS d'EDF-GDF dans le cadre d'un vaste programme "Solidaires d'une rive à l'autre" sur le port de Cannes, lieu d'expositions, de débats, de concerts, jusqu'à un défilé de mannequins algériennes à la barbe des "barbus"!
- une projection d'images à l'état brut tournées par Bertrand Tavernier sur les grévistes de la faim contre la "double peine" à Lyon, sur le lieu de rencontre de la quinzaine des réalisateurs à l'initiative de la SRF (Société des Réalisateurs de Films) et de l'ACID (Agence pour le Cinéma Indépendant dans sa Diffusion)

- Robert Hue déjeuner avec Cédric Klapish et Jean-Henri Roger, co-présidents de la SRF, autour d'une réflexion sur l'avenir du cinéma indépendant et sur la question de l'immigration et des régularisations qui taraude les cinéastes au point d'avoir occupé une grande partie du déjeuner.
- la trentième édition de la quinzaine des réalisateurs.
- les films soutenus par l'ACID présentés au cinéma "les Arcades" et au "Studio 13" dont "d'une brousse à l'autre" de Jacques Kébadian qui relate l'histoire de Dodo Wagué, "sans-papiers" de l'église Saint-Bernard, retournant rendre visite à sa famille au Mali après avoir obtenu des "papiers" (sortie en salle le 2 septembre).
- la remise du prix de la jeunesse à un film choisi par un jury de jeunes cinéphiles invités par le ministère de la jeunesse et des sports.

Michèle SOULIGNAC, déléguée générale de la SRF (Société des Réalisateurs de Films) a bien voulu répondre à quelques questions :

A.P. *J'ai l'impression qu'il y a eu peu de débats autour du cinéma lors de cette 51^e édition du festival de Cannes ?*

M.S. Cannes n'a jamais été propice au débat, même s'il y a deux ans la création de l'UDIC (Union Des Indépendants du Cinéma) avait été l'occasion d'une large réflexion sur l'avenir du cinéma en France et en Europe. C'est quand même à Cannes cette année qu'on a avancé dans la constitution du BLOC (Bureau de Liaison des Organisations du Cinéma) grâce aux contacts entre la SRF et l'UPF (Union des Producteurs de Films).

A.P. *Comment est venue l'idée du BLOC ?*

M.S. Essentiellement de la volonté de recomposition des organisations professionnelles représentant les indépendants du cinéma, face à la concentration croissante du secteur autour de quelques groupes. La SRF et l'UPF mais aussi le SFA (Syndicat Français des Acteurs) et sûrement bientôt le SNTR (Syndicat National des Techniciens et Réalisateurs) et le SDI (Syndicat des Distributeurs Indépendants), l'AFCAE (Association Française des Cinémas d'Art et Essai) ont décidé de renforcer leurs liens . Le BLOC constitue un outil pour la défense des indépendants de toute la chaîne de création cinématographique qui doit devenir opérationnel dans les semaines à venir.

A.P. *Y aurait-il "péril dans la demeure" pour le cinéma français alors que les entrées en salle et le nombre de films produits ont augmenté ?*

M.S. Certains signes sont en effet encourageants. Cependant, nous avons besoin de davantage de films encore, autour de 200 films par an, pour que l'expression artistique dans sa pleine diversité puisse exister mais aussi pour répondre à la demande croissante de films . L'avènement des grands groupes privilégiant des logiques financières tend à faire baisser le nombre de guichets, donc à réduire le degré de liberté des cinéastes. Les producteurs indépendants eux-mêmes ont plus de difficultés à monter leurs films .

A.P. *On a pourtant l'impression que tout est mis en oeuvre aujourd'hui pour constituer un pôle industriel fort ?*

M.S. On semble vouloir ménager nos champions nationaux européens face à Hollywood: mais n'est-ce pas un jeu de dupes quand on sait que ces groupes ont tendance à produire un cinéma, pâle copie de l'original hollywoodien . Nos cinéastes sont pourtant capables du meilleur dans une autre écriture, un autre rythme, d'autres couleurs . De plus, les groupes se servent des films comme de simples produits d'appel permettant d'engranger des profits sur des produits dérivés : l'art et la culture n'ont plus rien à voir là dedans ! Si l'on veut éviter une standardisation des films, il faudra encadrer la concentration : la vitalité du cinéma passe par l'existence d'un pôle indépendant fort pour toutes les composantes de la chaîne cinématographique.

Article 11

POUR UNE POLITIQUE EUROPÉENNE DE LA PRODUCTION ET DE LA DIFFUSION

La France prend l'initiative de proposer une politique industrielle européenne d'investissements pour la production de programmes audiovisuels et logiciels dont le montant doit atteindre dans un délai de 5 ans, 1 % du PIB consolidé des pays membres de l'Union européenne.

Cette politique participe au soutien de l'innovation, de la création et de la recherche dans les secteurs de la communication audiovisuelle publique et privée.

La France propose que 10 % de la programmation des chaînes européennes soit réservé à des programmes européens autres que celui du pays diffuseur.

La France est à l'initiative de négociations permettant la mise en place d'un fonds de garanties européen pour la création audiovisuelle.

La France est à l'initiative de négociations afin de permettre la création d'un fonds de soutien à l'exportation et à la distribution de programmes audiovisuels européens en Europe et dans le monde et notamment en direction des pays de l'Europe Centrale et des pays en voie de développement.

Les coopérations audiovisuelles nationales et européennes seront renforcées en direction des pays de l'Europe Centrale, de l'Europe de l'Est et de l'ensemble des pays en voie de développement.

La nostalgie est toujours ce qu'elle était,
la réception communiste de *Germinal* de Claude Berri⁷⁴

L'ampleur que prit la sortie de *Germinal*, le 29 septembre 1993, ne fut pas le fruit du hasard. À film exceptionnel — adaptation d'un classique populaire de la littérature française, dotée d'une distribution prestigieuse, et du plus gros budget cinématographique français jusqu'alors (160 millions de francs) —, réception exceptionnelle. Sans parler de la télévision, l'ensemble de la grande presse française, quotidienne et hebdomadaire, lui consacre une couverture médiatique impressionnante (*Le Nouvel Observateur*, 7 pages; *Télérama*, 6; *Le Figaro Magazine*, *Le Monde*, 5 pages; *Le Point*, *L'Express*, *La Croix*, 4), ceci faisant suite à une première vague déjà très fournie à l'automne 1992, qui faisait état des péripéties du tournage.

Le Parti communiste français, par l'intermédiaire de son quotidien d'information *L'Humanité*, prêta sa voix à ce déluge rédactionnel — et promotionnel —, après avoir accueilli, deux semaines auparavant, l'équipe du film sur la scène centrale de la « Fête de *L'Humanité* ». Je m'attacherai ici à analyser la spécificité de la réception communiste, dans ce qu'elle contient de problématique, de contradictoire, mais aussi de symptomatique du malaise ressenti par ce parti face à une société française en mutation. Il me faudra pour cela inscrire cette réception dans sa dimension historique, en la comparant à des prises de position précédentes du PCF, que ce soit face à Zola, à des adaptations antérieures de *Germinal* au cinéma ou de films traitant de l'univers de la mine.

A l'instar d'une grande partie de la presse française, la réception communiste est duelle. D'un côté, l'événement *Germinal*, de l'autre, le film. Que ce soit dans *L'Humanité*, *L'Humanité-dimanche* ou *Révolution*, les trois principaux journaux communistes, c'est l'événementiel qui domine très largement. On évoque "l'étonnant écho de *Germinal* un siècle

⁷⁴ This article was published in *Excavatio*, 11 (1997), 154-159. See chapter 8, pp. 307-309.

après”⁷⁵, preuve à l’appui, insiste le quotidien communiste, puisqu’un sondage publié à la sortie du film vient confirmer que “61% des ouvriers et 54% des Français estiment que « les choses n’ont pas changé en profondeur » en un siècle”. La sincérité et la bonne foi du réalisateur et des premiers rôles reçoivent tour à tour les éloges des journalistes. Tirant ses informations du livre de Pierre Assouline⁷⁶, le critique Jean-Pierre Léonardini s’empresse de citer les bons états de service généalogiques de Berri, Depardieu, Renaud et Miou Miou, qui tous sont issus d’un milieu ouvrier, minier, communiste, où “il n’y avait pas de la viande tous les jours”. Hommage est ensuite rendu aux figurants, anciens mineurs que “la phase aiguë de la crise sociale moderne” a réduits au chômage, et qui s’identifient totalement, nous dit-on, aux personnages zoliens. Ces figurants sont ceux-là même que Françoise Colpin, journaliste à *Révolution*, a rencontrés lors de ses visites en pays minier : “Ces hommes qui étaient de la trempe de ceux qui menèrent pendant 56 jours la grève d’Anzin, dans laquelle Zola a puisé les éléments documentaires de cette fresque du concret”. Elle a d’ailleurs retrouvé dans le film “la pérennité de la douleur” et “la dignité” qui font corps à cette région. Les réserves, somme toute assez ridicules, exprimées par un grand patron du Nord, qui craint que *Germinal* ne donne de la région une mauvaise image de marque, deviennent la preuve de “l’étrange retour de manivelle dialectique” provoqué par le film. Je pourrais multiplier à l’infini ces exemples d’arguments laudatifs dont on aura remarqué qu’aucun ne prend en compte *Germinal* pour ce qu’il est, c’est-à-dire un (très) long métrage de cinéma.

De fait, si l’on regarde de plus près les nombreuses pages consacrées à l’événement *Germinal*, on s’aperçoit que la critique cinématographique y tient une place des plus restreintes, noyée qu’elle est dans la déferlante promotionnelle. Sur les cinq pages de *L’Humanité* du 29 septembre couvrant sa sortie, la critique du film proprement dite occupe en tout et pour tout une colonne. Le reste décrit les gens du Nord qui “avaient les larmes aux

⁷⁵ *L’Humanité*, 29 septembre 1993.

⁷⁶ Il y a d’ailleurs lieu de s’étonner que le journaliste communiste approuve le livre d’Assouline, tant celui-ci y manifeste plus des talents d’agent promotionnel que de véritable journaliste. Pour preuve, les deux exemples suivants : Berri y est comparé au metteur en scène de *La Bête humaine* : “Son *Germinal* est placé sous le signe de Jean Renoir”, et Assouline se réjouit presque de l’échec du film minier d’Éric Barbier, *Le Brasier*. échec que Berri semble lui-même avoir souhaité. Bel exemple de solidarité cinématographique fort peu « germinalesque ». Pierre Assouline, *Germinal ou l’aventure d’un film*, Paris : Fayard, 1993, 394 p.

yeux” lors de la première à Lille, promeut le livre de Cavanna, *Les Enfants de Germinal* ou encore reproduit une interview de Marcel Barrois, président du syndicat CGT des mineurs du Nord-Pas-de-Calais, qui, “tel Lantier de Zola, séduit d’emblée”. Même cas de figure à *L’Humanité-dimanche* où, après une enquête de trois pages intitulée “Impressions d’aujourd’hui sur le pays de Germinal” et deux pages d’entretien avec Claude Berri, le texte de Gilles Le Morvan n’occupe qu’une seule et unique colonne. La teneur de ces critiques explique peut-être cette portion congrue. En effet, mise à part Françoise Colpin, les jugements portés envers le film s’avèrent pour le moins ambivalents. Leonardini trouve que “*Germinal* sent un peu le labeur”, qu’on n’y atteint pas à “l’indispensable pathos, à la sublime emphase emportant tout sur son passage”, que les scènes de foule “exhalent toujours une odeur de mise en place”, que “chaque détail s’avère parlant”, mais que “l’unisson symphonique se fait attendre”. Ce n’est visiblement pas l’enthousiasme. Dans leur insistance sur l’exactitude des décors, la conformité des lieux et gestes, on sent bien que ni Gilles Le Morvan, ni Luce Vigo dans *Révolution* n’ont été réellement conquis par le film. Le premier se montre d’une part assez dur envers le choix et la direction des acteurs et actrices, d’autre part franchement sévère envers les dialogues qui ne sont que “paroles désuètes où pointe la langue de bois”⁷⁷. Le critique communiste dénonce ainsi le caractère mortifère de la nouvelle adaptation de *Germinal* qui contribue “à ranger le monde ouvrier dans les tiroirs de l’histoire”. De façon apparemment contradictoire, Luce Vigo formule en fait les mêmes réticences quand elle regrette que “Claude Berri ne doive la modernité de son propos qu’à la reprise, mot pour mot, des phrases de Zola”⁷⁸.

Réception dichotomique donc au sein de la presse communiste. Les réticences cinéphiles disparaissent derrière l’entreprise mytho-glorificatrice dont font l’objet la mine et les mineurs et à laquelle participe pleinement le Parti communiste. Le film n’est pas un chef d’œuvre, loin de là, mais c’est pratiquement un devoir de l’aller voir.

⁷⁷ *L’Humanité-dimanche*, 23 septembre 1993.

⁷⁸ *Révolution*, n° 710, 7 octobre 1993. Luce Vigo eut la surprise de voir ce compte rendu, où filtre une déception certaine, coiffé d’un très gros bandeau vertical intitulé “Vive *Germinal*”, et publié en quatrième page face à une grande photo du film.

La comparaison avec l'adaptation réalisée par Yves Allégret en 1963 va nous aider à mettre en lumière les enjeux sous-jacents à la réception communiste du *Germinal* de Claude Berri.

Il apparaît très vite qu'en termes cinématographiques l'accueil du film d'Allégret ne fut pas si différent. Certains des reproches faits au *Germinal* de Berri font écho à ceux soulevés par cette adaptation du roman. Cependant, au lieu d'être perdus dans la masse promotionnelle, ces reproches sont le corps même de la réception, celle-ci étant laissée aux seuls soins des critiques cinématographiques et littéraires. Dans les *Lettres françaises*, Armand Lanoux estime que s'ils n'ont pas trahi l'idéologie, le réalisateur et son scénariste, Charles Spaak, ont cependant trahi le roman. C'est avec des accents de colère qu'il s'en prend à cette blquette minière, cette carcasse vide où deux des personnages principaux, le Voreux et la foule, disparaît pour l'un, apparaît simplement "maigrelette, anecdotique, chétive" pour l'autre. Regrettant un nouveau *Potemkine*, le film lui semble indigne de "l'entrée de la guerre sociale dans la littérature mondiale"⁷⁹. Dans le même numéro, Marcel Martin se montre lui aussi assez tiède : "il manque la grandeur et la flamme... il manque aussi le miracle d'une création artistique originale...", dit-il. Et s'il ressent une émotion, "c'est grâce à Zola plus qu'au réalisateur...". L'écrivain et le roman sont beaucoup plus présents dans l'évaluation du film d'Allégret. Ce qui diffère également le plus avec la nouvelle adaptation, c'est le lien établi entre le film et la réalité contemporaine de sa sortie. Si Marcel Martin effectue ce rapport au présent⁸⁰, on lui reconnaîtra cependant un souci d'objectivité : "Cent ans après les événements qu'il met en scène, le roman garde une douloureuse actualité : non plus tellement en France (voire !), mais en bien des endroits du monde et pas tellement loin de nos frontières..."⁸¹. Dans *L'Humanité*, Samuel Lachize se félicite qu'un cinéaste s'attache au milieu ouvrier, thème effectivement rare dans le cinéma français de cette période⁸², et si, à

⁷⁹ Armand Lanoux, "Germinal ou le nouveau Maître des Forges", *Les Lettres françaises*, 26 septembre-2 octobre 1963, pp. 1 & 14.

⁸⁰ À la grande différence de Claude Berri, Yves Allégret réfute cette interprétation; il déclare, au contraire que le film est plutôt un témoignage sur le passé, in *L'Humanité*, 19 septembre 1963.

⁸¹ Marcel Martin, 'Germinal, honorable illustration', *Les Lettres françaises*, 26 septembre-2 octobre 1963, p. 14.

⁸² Le film fera l'objet d'une projection privée réservée aux cadres de la CGT, syndicat proche du PCF. Ceux-ci rendront hommage au réalisateur : ainsi, Henri Krasucki, futur secrétaire général de la CGT qui remercie le

l'instar de Marcel Martin, il manifeste une gêne devant la froideur et l'absence de souffle épique du film, il en sait gré à son metteur en scène d'avoir "presque surmonté toutes [les embûches] et conservé intact l'esprit de Zola sans se livrer à des parallèles arbitraires avec l'actualité contemporaine"⁸³.

Comment comprendre une telle divergence d'attitude par rapport aux parallèles établis avec l'actualité contemporaine ? Un aperçu des prises de position du PCF face au roman et son auteur ainsi que de la politique du PCF envers les mineurs depuis la Libération nous fournira des éléments de réponse à cette interrogation.

On peut en effet faire remonter aux années 1945-1947, le commencement d'une véritable mythologie communiste de la mine. Premier parti de France en 1946, l'influence du PCF se fait sentir dans tout le pays. Le 21 juillet 1945, Maurice Thorez, Secrétaire général du Parti et membre du gouvernement, s'adresse aux mineurs de Waziers en ces termes : "Produire, faire du charbon, c'est la forme la plus élevée de votre devoir de classe, de votre devoir de Français". La « Bataille de la production » est lancée⁸⁴. Le mineur, secouriste de la patrie, et par là même héros national, doit être prêt à tous les sacrifices. Les discours de responsables communistes ou syndicaux de l'époque — il en fallut de nombreux pour galvaniser des ouvriers pour lesquels le fruit de leurs efforts se fait douloureusement attendre — mentionnent rarement *Germinal*. De plus, l'œuvre de Zola n'est pas citée dans les critiques communistes du film du cinéaste militant Louis Daquin, *Le Point du jour*, réalisé en 1948 et sorti en 1949⁸⁵. Cette absence, qui peut surprendre de prime abord, s'explique assez logiquement au vu de la situation contemporaine. Passés la nationalisation des Houillères de

cinéaste au nom de l'organisation syndicale pour avoir fait avec ce film, « quelque chose de bien pour les travailleurs », in *L'Humanité*, 11 octobre 1963.

⁸³ *L'Humanité*, 21 octobre 1963.

⁸⁴ Sur toute cette période, voir en particulier : Évelyne Desbois, Yves Jeanneau, Bruno Mattéi, *La Foi des charbonniers : les mineurs dans la bataille du charbon 1945-1947*. Paris : Éditions de la Maison des sciences de l'homme, 1986. Les auteurs questionnent le rôle de la CGT et du PCF, accusés de s'être emparés de la mémoire des mineurs. D'après eux, le statut du mineur et la nationalisation, par exemple, n'affranchirent pas les mineurs mais garantirent plutôt la perpétuation de leur dépendance à l'égard de l'entreprise (p. 181). D'autre part, les auteurs citent l'un des rares auteurs, mineur lui-même, à s'être insurgé contre cette imagerie à « sens unique », il s'agit de Constant Malva, qui fut à l'époque très critique du film de Louis Daquin (pp. 77-79).

⁸⁵ Ce film que l'on cite souvent comme le seul film réaliste-socialiste français est un hommage à la solidarité des mineurs et à leur travail (le jeune de la famille qui ne voulait pas « descendre » finit par aller au fond avec fierté).

France et le vote du statut du mineur⁸⁶, mesures dont s'enorgueillit le PCF, il serait malvenu de faire référence aux conditions misérables que connut jadis la mine et que décrivit Zola. En 1947, les mineurs ne sont plus ces êtres frustes, soumis à de brutales passions, politiquement analphabètes, mais des ouvriers fiers, industriels, les sauveurs de la nation. Rappeler leurs conditions de vie antérieures, cela signifierait surtout oublier les acquis conquis de haute lutte par les mineurs et *leur* organisation, c'est-à-dire le PCF qui recueille, ne l'oublions pas près de 25% des suffrages de la nation⁸⁷. D'ailleurs toute entreprise qui ne confirme pas l'image pieuse et positive de l'ouvrier travailleur et honnête est systématiquement dénoncée par le PCF comme propagande anticomuniste. Citons pour exemple les démêlés de Marcel Pagliero avec la CGT et le Parti communiste en 1949 au sujet de son film, *Un Homme marche dans la ville*⁸⁸. Ce rapport au travail, empreint de stakhanovisme, se retrouve dans l'ouvrage de Jean Fréville, *Zola, semeur d'orages*, où l'écrivain vante en Zola, "le glorificateur du travail". Le parti connaît alors sa grande période jdanovienne, celle du réalisme socialiste, la lecture que donne Fréville de Zola en est pétrie⁸⁹. Caricaturons ce qui se présentait déjà sous des traits caricaturaux : l'Histoire a un sens, celui du progrès. Grâce au socialisme, les mineurs nageront dans le bonheur et le grisou ne sera plus mortel.

La force politique du PCF⁹⁰, son implantation au sein d'un milieu ouvrier très puissant⁹¹ expliquent également la réception du *Germinal* d'Yves Allégret. Là encore, par trop insister sur un éventuel parallèle entre les conditions de 1963, année du dernier mouvement de masse de la corporation, et celles décrites par Zola, s'avérerait contre-productif. L'heure n'est pas encore à la nostalgie. Le nombre d'ouvriers en France n'atteindra son apogée qu'en 1975 (8.5 millions), année de la publication de l'ouvrage d'André Marc Vial, *Germinal et le «*

⁸⁶ La nationalisation fut votée le 17 mai 1946, Le statut des mineurs, qui institue le droit au logement et au chauffage gratuit, le 14 juin de la même année.

⁸⁷ À l'occasion du 27^e Congrès du PCF, *L'Humanité* publie un encart spécial dans lequel, entre autres, plusieurs régions de France sont présentées. Par exemple, Le Martinet, village cévenol du bassin minier alésien, où "les mineurs se sont immédiatement identifiés à ce tout jeune parti et, en septembre 1921, pour leurs premières élections, ils lui confient les rênes de la municipalité", in *L'Humanité*, 18 décembre 1990.

⁸⁸ Tourné au Havre, *Un Homme marche dans la ville*, situé dans le milieu ouvrier, abordait les problèmes de l'alcoolisme et de la violence domestique. Une campagne de protestations contre le film fut orchestrée par la CGT et le PCF, et joua un rôle important dans l'échec commercial du film.

⁸⁹ Jean Fréville, *Zola semeur d'orages*, Paris :Éditions sociales, in-16, 1952, pp. 71-72.

⁹⁰ 21,8% des suffrages exprimés aux élections législatives de 1962.

⁹¹ Les ouvriers comptent pour deux tiers des salariés français en 1966.

socialisme » de Zola, où l'analyse se veut plus complète, plus mesurée et plus objective que celle des années cinquante⁹². Pourtant, trois ans plus tard, paraît la préface d'André Wurmser à l'édition de *Germinal* dirigée par Henri Mitterand⁹³, qui semble marquer un retour à l'esprit des discours antérieurs. Dans ce texte, André Wurmser met l'accent sur le Zola journaliste qu'il juge plus digne d'éloges que le Zola romancier : "Ce que rapporte Zola plaide pour les mineurs; ne les condamne que ce qu'il invente". Et si c'est, au regard de la lutte des classes, "le seul roman fondamentalement vrai, un roman sans précédent, et *sans successeur*", il désigne néanmoins des héritiers au livre de Zola : les admirables nouvelles d'André Stil, ou *Les Communistes* de Louis Aragon⁹⁴ pour la simple raison que les basses classes, que *Germinal* avait fait entrer dans le roman, disparaîtront de la littérature française avec son auteur pour ne réapparaître que dans ces ouvrages. Argument qu'il reprend de son article, "Les Marxistes, Balzac et Zola", paru dans les *Cahiers naturalistes* en 1964⁹⁵. Pour le moins abusive, cette filiation entre le Zola de *Germinal* et des auteurs alors au comble de leur période stalinienne n'en démontre pas moins l'endurance d'une vision platement dogmatique de l'écrivain. Premier roman de la lutte des classes, de la dénonciation du capitalisme, aux yeux du PCF, ce roman en quelque sorte appartient aux communistes français puisque ce sont eux, les seuls véritables défenseurs de la classe ouvrière.

C'est dans cette vision restreinte, restrictive du roman ainsi que dans son appropriation abusive que l'on trouvera également l'origine de la réception de l'adaptation du film de Berri. Seulement voilà, ce nouveau *Germinal* envahit les écrans alors que le Parti communiste français connaît l'une des phases les plus difficiles de ses soixante-dix années d'existence⁹⁶. Le PCF affronte une crise existentielle majeure. D'une part il a perdu, en l'espace d'une génération une grande part de son électorat, passant de 21,6% des suffrages en 1963 à 6,4%

⁹² André Marc Vial, *Germinal et le « socialisme » de Zola*, Paris : Éditions sociales, 1975.

⁹³ André Wurmser, "préface", *Germinal*, Ed. Henri Mitterand, Paris : Gallimard, pp. 9-46. André Wurmser fut critique littéraire aux *Lettres françaises* de 1947 à 1972 et, à partir de 1954, éditorialiste à *L'Humanité*.

⁹⁴ *Ibid.* pp. 15-16.

⁹⁵ André Wurmser, "Les Marxistes, Balzac et Zola", *Cahiers naturalistes*, n° 28, 1964. pp. 137-148.

⁹⁶ "Le PCF reste dans les basses eaux de son influence électorale qui font du pourcentage obtenu en mars 1993 (6,4 % des inscrits) l'un des deux plus mauvais scores de toute son histoire électorale législative", in Roger Martelli, "1993 : un résultat communiste en demi-teinte", *Société française*, n° 46, printemps 1993, pp. 2-9.

trente ans plus tard. D'autre part, son assise ouvrière se voit concurrencée par l'extrême-droite dans nombre de ses bastions traditionnels. Enfin, et plus profondément, l'Europe communiste ayant implosé, c'est tout un système de références qui s'est écroulé, la terre s'est refermée sur ces modèles que l'on jugeait il n'y a pas si longtemps "globalement positifs". En proie à l'amertume, face au vide, les communistes français (re)découvrent la nostalgie. N'est-il pas alors de meilleur messenger à ce sentiment que le cinéma, surtout quand celui-ci s'attache à la transcription d'un texte que l'on dit fondateur ? Dans une conférence sur le film de Scorsese *New York New York*, Jacqueline Nacache rappelle que "le sentiment nostalgique, en tant que conscience de la perte et aspiration à retrouver un idéal égaré, est indissociablement lié à l'utopie, au regret d'un monde harmonieux parce qu'entier, préservé de toute fracture"⁹⁷. Idéal égaré, utopie, regret d'un monde harmonieux, autant de termes qui font écho aux illusions anciennes ou définissent précisément l'état d'esprit des communistes en 1993. On se rend compte alors de ce que l'adaptation cinématographique de *Germinal*, quels que soient ses qualités ou ses défauts, portait en elle de symbolique pour les communistes français. Bien sûr, *Germinal* et son message révolutionnaire justifient les combats passés mais plus encore, ils justifient la survie, l'existence même du PCF en 1993. Cet accueil de la fiction socialiste originelle, écrite trente avant la Révolution bolchevique, il faut le voir comme acte purificateur, comme volonté inconsciente de renaissance. Ce retour sur un écrivain français d'avant le bolchevisme permet au PCF, en forçant les échos contemporains, l'oblitération des modèles étrangers déchus, tout en soulignant le caractère national de son passé.

Ainsi la réception communiste du film de Claude Berri s'explique-t-elle par des raisons internes. La raison de parti l'a emporté. Sans cela, comment comprendre que cet accueil se démarque aussi peu de la presse autrefois qualifiée de « bourgeoise » ? Comment expliquer la défense d'un film dont on sait que les figurants furent payés en dessous des tarifs syndicaux ? Comment expliquer qu'un maigre entrefilet annonçait dans *L'Humanité* que *Germinal* inaugurerait, en présence du réalisateur et du ministre de la Culture, Jacques Toubon, le

⁹⁷ Jacqueline Nacache, "L'hommage et la nostalgie", in Jacques Aumont (ed.), *Pour un cinéma comparé*, Paris : Cinémathèque française, 1996, pp. 299-317.

supercomplexe de Thais dans le Val-de-Marne, alors que l'on savait pertinemment que ces nouvelles salles entraîneraient la disparition de celles des centre-villes, pourtant seules garantes d'une distribution pluraliste ?

Il ne faut pas sous-estimer non plus la dimension industrielle, économique, de la réception communiste de *Germinal*. Très impliqué dans le débat qui agitait les milieux artistiques autour du Gatt, le PCF est très actif dans la campagne pour l'exception culturelle européenne. De par l'ampleur de sa production et l'étendue (prévisible) de son succès, *Germinal* représente aux yeux des communistes français une réponse à l'hégémonie américaine dans le domaine des superproductions. C'est bien, comme le souligne *Le Figaro*⁹⁸, d'un duel entre les deux mastodontes américain et français qu'il s'agit : *Jurassic Park* et *Germinal*. L'adaptation d'un classique de la littérature française tenant la dragée haute au dernier Spielberg, il n'en faut pas plus pour contenter les avocats de l'exception culturelle⁹⁹.

Les contradictions de la réception communiste de *Germinal* en marquent aussi les limites. Ce n'est pas *Germinal* qui peut concurrencer le cinéma américain¹⁰⁰, ce ne sont pas les grandes reconstitutions historiques, tirées du patrimoine national, qui éveillent les futurs talents. On répondra évidemment que le film connut un énorme succès public. Est-ce pour cela signe d'une prise de conscience politique, comme l'on voudrait nous le faire croire ? Devant un tel battage publicitaire, le doute est permis. Comme l'écrit Marc Vernet, "l'institution cinématographique ne peut pas être uniquement conçue comme une usine à rêves ; c'est également une machine à éteindre les rêves"¹⁰¹, aussi est-il possible de considérer *Germinal* comme une sorte de « panthéonisation » d'une classe ouvrière qui

⁹⁸ "La plus lourde production française (160 millions de francs). [...] *Germinal* gagne son pari et totalise aujourd'hui 5 500 000 spectateurs. *Jurassic Park*, 6 300 000 (sortie le 20 octobre)", *Le Figaro*, 29 décembre 1993.

⁹⁹ D'autres marquent leurs réticences, tels les *Cahiers du cinéma* : "Quels films nous propose-t-on pour lutter contre le fameux impérialisme de l'Oncle Sam ? Au hasard, *Germinal* de Claude Berri qui cumule ici les fonctions de réalisateur et de producteur... [...] Contentons-nous de constater que c'est un épisode de plus dans la restauration d'un cinéma un peu compassé et parfaitement illustratif au cœur duquel le réalisateur-producteur tend à remplacer les problèmes de mise en scène par des questions d'intendances...", *Cahiers du cinéma*, n° 472, octobre 1993.

¹⁰⁰ C'est le *Cinquième élément* de Luc Besson.

¹⁰¹ Marc Vernet, *Figures de l'absence*, Paris : Cahiers du cinéma, 1990, p. 7.

n'existe plus telle quelle¹⁰², une sorte de "funérailles nationales de l'ouvrier mythique", selon l'expression de René Ballet¹⁰³. Évitions toute méprise. Il n'est pas question d'abonder dans le sens d'un Louis Pauwels qui déclare "ne voir aucun rapport structurel" entre la société de *Germinal* et la sienne, et affirme que le niveau de vie d'un couple de smicards est largement supérieur à celle d'un rentier moyen sous Napoléon III, comparaison aussi stupide que révoltante¹⁰⁴. La France de 1993 subit une crise économique grave, dont les effets se font durement sentir chez les plus démunis, c'est comme l'écrit souvent *L'Humanité*, une France de l'exclusion, de la fracture sociale, du chômage et de la précarité. Simplement, le choix commémoratif et le style grandiloquent de Claude Berri n'apparaissent nullement comme les meilleurs vecteurs d'un sursaut, d'une nouvelle conscience, et surtout, ne peuvent pas atteindre un public jeune. *Germinal* de Berri, c'est le voyage scolaire au musée de la Mine. Cette dernière adaptation de *Germinal*, qui dut décevoir les attentes d'un Henri Mitterand, qui espérait que le film saurait saisir et transposer la démesure d'une œuvre épique, fantastique, lyrique, folle¹⁰⁵, ne constitue pas, en 1993, la traduction cinématographique d'un marxisme vivant. N'est-ce pas André Wurmser lui-même qui écrivait trente auparavant que "le réalisme est un rapport entre une réalité mouvante et son observateur, qui n'est pas moins mobile, qui change avec le monde qu'il transforme", tirant de ceci la conclusion que cette perpétuelle variation implique l'invention perpétuelle d'expressions nouvelles¹⁰⁶ ?

Ces formes nouvelles existent. Il faut se tourner vers des premiers films, ou des films de jeunes réalisateurs qui parlent d'une réalité contemporaine, sans sensiblerie ni nostalgie

¹⁰² Voir l'article de Michel Verret, "Classe ouvrière, mouvement ouvrier. Où va le mouvement ouvrier français ?", *Communisme*, n° 28, 1990, pp. 40-48 : Régression massive de la classe ouvrière : de 8,5 millions d'ouvriers en 1975 à 7 aujourd'hui, dont 6 seulement occupés. Une déconcentration non moins massive : dans l'ordre productif (après les centres miniers et textiles, les concentrations sidérurgiques, métallurgiques, mécaniques, portuaires, volent en éclat) ; dans l'ordre résidentiel (à la désertification productive et active, des régions ouvrières traditionnelles : Nord-Pas-de-Calais, Lorraine, bordures navales, s'ajoute sur tout le territoire, le transfert continu des populations ouvrières de l'habitat collectif concentré à l'habitat individuel dispersé) ; dans l'ordre culturel (à la dispersion productive et résidentielle, correspond la disparition de tout un monde ouvrier associatif.

¹⁰³ René Ballet, "Présence ouvrière dans les arts et la littérature de l'après-guerre", in Claude Willard (ed.), *La France ouvrière. Tome 3 : De 1968 à nos jours*, Paris : Les Éditions de l'Atelier/Les Éditions ouvrières, 1995, p. 25.

¹⁰⁴ Louis Pauwels, *Le Figaro-magazine*, 16 octobre 1993.

¹⁰⁵ *Le Quotidien de Paris*, 28 septembre 1993. Déçu, il le sera effectivement; voir Henri Mitterand, *Zola, la vérité en marche*, Paris: Découvertes Gallimard, 1995, p. 72.

¹⁰⁶ André Wurmser, "Les Marxistes, Balzac et Zola", *Cahiers naturalistes*, n° 28, 1964, p. 139.

d'avant-hiers qui chantent, mais avec beaucoup de subtilité, d'opiniâtreté et d'espoir dans l'avenir. Citons *En avoir ou pas* de Lætitia Masson, *La Promesse* des frères Dardenne, *Marion* de Manuel Poirier, parmi d'autres. Surtout, si l'on cherche la trace de *Germinal* dans le cinéma français d'aujourd'hui, c'est *La Vie de Jésus* qu'il faut absolument voir. Ce premier film de Bruno Dumont recèle en lui la violence et la puissance de l'œuvre de Zola. Du concours de pinsons à l'aveuglant soleil, de l'amour animal au crime gratuit, on y découvre le pays minier tel qu'il apparaîtrait sept ans après la fermeture du dernier puits¹⁰⁷. Les germinations espérées ont laissé place à une friche industrielle et, ce qui est plus grave, une humanité en friche. Ce n'est plus *Germinal*, c'est Nivôse sous un soleil de plomb.

En conclusion, la réception dithyrambique du film de Claude Berri par le Parti Communiste Français tient plus à ses difficultés à envisager son avenir après les coups de grisou nationaux et internationaux subis durant la décennie. Malgré la nostalgie revendiquée face à ce retour à la source que représente *Germinal*, la sortie du film correspond pourtant à un tournant dans l'histoire contemporaine du PCF. Une semaine après la sortie du film, Georges Marchais annonce qu'il ne se représentera pas au poste de Secrétaire général, après avoir tenu les rênes du parti pendant près de vingt-deux ans. De son côté, au même moment, l'hebdomadaire de la CGT, *V.O.-La Vie Ouvrière* change de nom pour devenir *L'HEBDO de l'actualité sociale-la Vie Ouvrière-CGT*, le premier numéro sous ce nouveau titre contient justement les témoignages de figurants ayant participé au tournage de *Germinal*¹⁰⁸. Coïncidences heureuses, dira-t-on, mais néanmoins symptomatiques de la fin d'une époque. De l'écriture du roman à l'imagerie pieuse et héroïque des ouvriers célébrée par Berri, la boucle semble bouclée. Le Parti communiste français doit maintenant faire la preuve qu'il a changé, mué, comme dirait plutôt Robert Hue, son nouveau Secrétaire national. En attendant des preuves de cette mutation annoncée à grand bruit, remarquons simplement la résistance étonnante de ce parti qui siège aujourd'hui au gouvernement, quatre ans après la sortie de *Germinal*.

¹⁰⁷ 21 décembre 1990 : arrêt du dernier puits, le 9 d'Oignies. "La Terre se referme à Oignies" titre *L'Humanité* ce même jour.

¹⁰⁸ Le changement de titre a lieu entre les numéros 2561 du 27 septembre au 3 octobre 1993 et 2562/1 du 1er au 7 octobre 1993.

D - Films français, américains et d'autres nationalités

France Soir couvre 70% des exclusivités sorties pendant notre période de référence. Sur les 142 films couverts par France Soir, 51 sont français (soit 77% des films français), 64 sont américains (soit 83% des films américains) et 27% sont d'autres nationalités (soit 45% des films d'autres nationalités).

1 - Taux de couverture (Annexe 10)

Journaux	Taux de couverture global	Taux de couverture des Films Français	Taux de couverture des films américains	Taux de couverture des autres films
France Soir	70%	77%	83%	45%
Info Matin	85%	85%	81%	88%
L'Humanité	36%	50%	17%	42%
La Croix	61%	82%	44%	58%
Le Figaro	80%	80%	82%	75%
Le Monde	86%	89%	84%	83%
Le Parisien Libéré	82%	86%	84%	67%
Les Echos	59%	65%	55%	58%
Libération	86%	89%	83%	85%

See chapter 8, pp 307-09.

Journaux	Taux de couverture global	Taux de couverture des Films Français	Taux de couverture des films américains	Taux de couverture des autres films
La Nouvelle République du Centre-Ouest	21%	30%	21%	10%
La Voix du Nord	60%	58%	78%	40%
Le Progrès	71%	70%	81%	60%
Les Dernières Nouvelles d'Alsace	76%	74%	87%	63%
Nice Matin	49%	41%	68%	35%
Ouest France	75%	70%	87%	65%
Sud Ouest	48%	53%	51%	40%
Humanité Dimanche	33%	33%	27%	42%
Le Progrès Dimanche	38%	44%	49%	17%
Sud Ouest Dimanche	32%	38%	35%	20%
Elle	38%	44%	44%	23%
L'Événement du Jeudi	42%	39%	44%	45%
L'Express	65%	67%	60%	68%
La Vie	67%	71%	70%	57%
Le Figaro Magazine	34%	44%	39%	15%
Le Nouvel Observateur	91%	94%	90%	90%
Madame Figaro	47%	53%	35%	38%
Le Point	47%	53%	47%	38%
Pèlerin Magazine	34%	33%	43%	23%
Télérama	93%	91%	94%	93%

Nous sommes tous des Rosetta

David Cronenberg

Dominique Blanc / Doris Dörrie / Jeff Goldblum / Barbara Hendricks / Holly Hunter / George Miller
Maurizio Nichetti / Yasmina Reza / André Téchiné



Albert Algoud France Inter / Anne Andreu Le Monde de l'Éducation / Marie-Claude Arbaudie Le Film Français / Claude Balgnères Le Figaro / Thomas Bauder Le Journal du cinéma / Henri Béhar Vogue / Bernard Bénoliel Les Cahiers du cinéma / Eva Bettan France Inter / Agathe Blanchard France Inter / Véronique Billin Panorama du médecin / Françoise Boné France Inter / Olivier Bonnard Le Nouveau Cinéma / Frédéric Bonnaud Les Inrockuptibles / Michel Boujut Charlie Hebdo / Jean-Jacques Bourdin RTL / Patrick Boyer France Info / Emmanuel Burdeau Les Cahiers du cinéma / Claude Cabannes L'Humanité / Thierry Cheze Studio Magazine / Pascale Clark France Inter / Clélia Cohen Les Cahiers du cinéma / François Cohendy Le Progrès / Michel Cohen-Solal RTL / Marie Colmant France Inter / Annie Coppermann Les Echos / Antoine Cornery France 2 / Sylvie Coulomb France Inter / Anne-Sophie Courtines La Cinquième / Bruno Cras Europe 1 / Sophie Dacbert Le Film Français / Olivier De Bruyn Le Point / Albéric De Gouvillie RFI / Christian Dedadelsen TF1 / Thierry Demaizière RTL / Alexandre Devoise Nulle Part Ailleurs / Jean-Pierre Dufreigne L'Express / Jacques Duploux La Montagne / Véronique Dupont Numéro / Ruth Elkrief TF1 / Jean-Michel Frodon Le Monde / Isabelle Giordano Le Journal du cinéma / Christian Gonzales Figaro Madame / François Gorin Télérama / Michel Guilloux L'Humanité / Jean-Luc Hees France Inter / Christophe Hondelatte France Inter / Paula Jacques France Inter / Jean-Pierre Jeancolas Le Nouveau Politis / Marie-Jo Jouan France 2 / Serge Kaganski Les Inrockuptibles / Jean-Pierre Lacomme Le Journal du dimanche / Philippe Lagouche La Voix du Nord / Jean-Marc Lalanne Max / Marine Landrot Télérama / Jérôme Larcher Les Cahiers du cinéma / Claude Le Bihan Télérama / Marie-Françoise Leclère Le Point / Gaël Leforestier La Cinquième / Gérard Lefort France Inter / Florence Leroy France Info / Philippe Levasseur TF1 / Jean-Claude Loiseau Télérama / Jacques Mandelbaum Le Monde / Claude Martino La Marseillaise / Françoise Maupin Le Figaro / Salim Menia Radio libertaire / Pascal Mérigeau Le Nouvel Observateur / Nicolas Mondoly BFM / Yves Montmayeur Paris-Première / Jules-César Muraciolo Métropolis / Jean-Marc Nadaud LCI / Michel Palmieri Elle / Philippe Paumier Ciné Live / Didier Péron Libération / Philippe Plazzo Aden / Bernard Pivot France 2 / Patrick Poivre d'Arvor TF1 / Elisabeth Quin France Soir / Dominique Rabourdin Métropolis / Olivier Rajchman Ciné Live / Michel Rebichon Studio Magazine / Laurent Rigoulet Libération / Marie-Elisabeth Rouchy Le Nouveau Cinéma / Jean Roy L'Humanité / Philippe Royer La Croix / Jean-Jacques Rue Cinérom / Olivier Séguret Libération / Louis Skorecki Libération / Frédéric Théobald La Vie / Noël Tinazzi La Tribune / Daniel Toscan du Plantier Figaro Magazine / Serge Toubiana Les Cahiers du cinéma / Marie-Noëlle Tranchant Le Figaro / Claude-Marie Trémols Esprit / Richard Tripault France 3 / Ariane Valadié Voci / Pierre Vavasseur Le Parisien / Philippe Vecchi Nulle Part Ailleurs / Marc Volinchet France Culture / Laurent Weil M6

**Vous avez tous, passionnément, pris le parti de Rosetta.
Du fond du cœur, merci.**



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Conclusion

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